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The Black Cat

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started in November BLACK CAT and is purposely omitted this month to await your verdict. If the response from our readers shows that there is an interest taken it will be included every month. Look up your November number now or, if you haven't one, send your order for one of the above liberal offers and we will send you a copy of the November issue free containing full particulars of THE BLACK CAT club.

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CAPTAIN HARDTACK AND THE VELVET PRINCE

BY MABEL S. MERRILL

Although you will read this Christmas story before Thanksgiving Day, it is quite possible that it will have a place in your memory at Christmas time. Certainly it should linger long after so ephemeral a thing as a Thanksgiving turkey has gone the way of all flesh.

OU eat your grub, Rosyleen, and don't try none of your Settlement guff on me!" warned the captain, thriftily picking crumbs out of the wrinkles in his waistcoat and throwing them into his mouth. "What tarnal notion they been puttin' in your head now?"

Rosaline scintillated at him across the table.

"It's all true an' you'll believe it when I'm gone," she averred solemnly. "I've knowed for a good while that the velvet man was one of the princes he tells about story afternoons at the Settlement House. He's comin' for me in a gold coach with tossels, and he'll carry me off to live with him and the queen o' the fairies; that's his mother."

"Sho!" the captain was giggling in an insufferable way behind his hand. "You got time to wash up the plates for the old man once more 'fore that turnout heaves in?"

Rosaline sighed over her work that evening. Was the captain hopelessly light-minded? She had tried to tell him before about the Velvet Prince at the Settlement House—so she called him, because his hands and voice reminded her of velvet, and his mother, who sometimes came with him, actually wore a velvet gown. But the captain had received her confidences with ill-concealed derision. He admitted that she always knew better than he did what they could afford to have for dinner and how to make the coal hold out till Saturday night. Why in the world, then, wouldn't he believe the wonderful new things she was learning every day at the Social Settlement?

"Think of that face without the dirt, Mother!" the Velvet Prince had said that very afternoon, speaking to the queen of the fairies, but looking straight at Rosaline. "Why, she'd be the prettiest thing in the house! And you've always wanted a little girl. We could have her all right, too. I've found out that she hasn't any folks, but lives with a queer old sea dog down a dirty court, in a tenement house."

There! what could be plainer than that? The Velvet Prince was coming to take her to live with him. (Rosaline's flaming fancy easily supplied the gold coach with "tossels.") She was likely to be snatched away to fairyland, any time, now.

A sudden thought disturbed the quivering splendor of her dream: In losing her, Captain Hardtack would lose his natural protector. Rosaline sold morning papers and did a good business because she was nine years old, and knew how to look out of her eyes in a way that made people stop to buy. The money she brought in added materially to the well-being of the captain, who was a cripple and unable to earn much. Rosaline knew well that sometimes there would have been no bread and herrings in the larder but for the pennies contributed by her.

Therefore, she must provide for the captain before the prince came for her.

She pondered the matter for a few days and finally decided that she would get the captain a boarder. There was Brickdust Macaulay, who was thirteen and earned a lot of money. With Brickdust as an inmate of his home the captain would be better off than with her. It would be no trouble to arrange it; she knew that in the heart of Brickdust she was securely entrenched, so she prepared to bend him to her will without mercy.

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"You never had nobody to take care o' you," she told him sternly, "and you blow in your money for oyster stew and monkey shines. You 'n the captain 'll be a lovely hitch."

Brickdust promised, with his mouth dropping open, that he would effect the hitch as soon as she was gone, so Rosaline was free to dream about the gold coach and the coming of the Velvet Prince.

It happened just as she had said, except that, the evening being very dark, she couldn't see whether the coach was gold or not. But the Velvet Prince put her inside and, behold! the cushions were of velvet,—blue velvet!

The captain hunched himself higher on his crutches to look in at the window. Rosaline wondered what made white streaks on his face under the dirt. He had forgotten to pick the crumbs out of his waistcoat and he looked altogether disreputable. Brickdust was standing in the door of the tenement house and "Angel" McGrath, who was the captain's nearest neighbor, was quoting Scripture, as she did on every occasion, regardless of whom it hit.

"Nineveh is laid waste," she chanted. "I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease and will lay low the wickedness of the terrible."

"Rosyleen," murmured the captain feebly, "you mustn't ever think I was anyways aginst your goin', no matter what I've said. You'd ought to be a great lady—"

Rosaline jumped to the window. She had thought of a parting word.

"The dish-cloth is dryin' on the poker handle," she whispered, "an' Brickdust can sleep in my bed if you let him have the chair to put his legs in."

At these words a sudden blight seemed to fall upon the captain. He shrivelled and drooped till his forehead was down on the edge of the window. He raised it, much embarrassed and rubbed the place where it had rested with a dirty handkerchief.

"Goodbye, Rosyleen," he said.

And then Angel McGrath intoned something about the wrath of the Lord of Hosts and the carriage drove away.

It was even better in fairyland than Rosaline had expected. Everything one touched was as soft as a cat's back, and one could walk without making a sound on the carpet. At first Rosaline did not recognize herself in the great mirrors, then she laughed with delight. In the old Settlement days it had never occurred to her that her face was dirty and her dress ragged. The radiant gospel of cleanliness preached by the personal appearance of the Velvet Prince and his mother was so beautiful that she had never once thought of taking it to herself. But now—

She lifted a fold of her white dress and twirled on one foot before the glass. Every night when the Prince came home the first question he always asked was, "Where's my White Rose?" and when she came dancing down the hall to meet him he would pick her up and kiss her. So of course, it wouldn't do to be anything except a white rose. The child of Snowdrop Court told herself scornfully that she was gettin' to be a regular dude, but she kept the white dress clean and allowed her long hair to be twined in ringlets around the queen's own finger.

With the queen, Rosaline was inclined to preserve the protective attitude, so long kept for the captain and Brickdust. There were so many things the velvet-clad lady didn't know,—about selling papers, and how to outwit the boys and get the most for your money Saturdays, when you did the marketing, that Rosaline sometimes wondered how such an innocent had ever lived to grow up! Perhaps one didn't really grow up when one lived in fairyland; but just got big and stayed simple and had to have somebody take care of her.

These were Rosaline's daylight views. At dusk there were times when, lying in the queen's arms, with her cheek against the laces of her dress, the daughter of the tenements felt old age,—the weird old age of the street child,—slip from her and the soft warm mantle of babyhood swathe her in its rose-lined folds.

It was almost Christmas in fairyland.

"She says I must have a new dress—another one—and a white fur coat and hood, because Peter,—" such was the

strange name of the Velvet Prince,—"doesn't like to see me in anything but white. And we're all going sleigh-riding in the park and in the evening there'll be a tree."

Rosaline was standing at the window as she said this, and from behind the curtain she suddenly perceived a queer pair across the avenue: Brickdust and the captain—yes, it was! They were looking up eagerly at the windows, but not at the one where she stood. She waved her hand to them, but they did not see her. They turned away and Brickdust put his hand under the old man's arm. Rosaline rubbed her eyes incredulously, for it looked just as if the captain were crying!

When they were out of sight, she walked across to the fireplace and sat down on the rug.

"It would be the cap'n all over," she grumbled, "to go and get the mullygrubs," (the captain's favorite term for extreme despondency). "He's got Brickdust, but the kid ain't much good after all. I expect he loses the dish-cloth and scrubs the rag out o' the bottom of the kittle, and forgits to pick the burnt coal out of Angel's ash barrel."

She sat musing a long time in the firelight and her face grew tragical. She had not thought much about her old house-mate in these five breathless weeks, but now revelation was coming to her. By the love and joy in her own heart, by the feel of that soft-dropping, rose-lined mantle, she knew the ache and emptiness in the captain's soul.

When Peter, coming in like a thief in the early dark, caught her up and started to smother her with kisses as usual, she dismayed him by crying.

"For the Lord's sake, White Rose," he pleaded, "don't do that! What is it? Tell your old man all about it."

But Rosaline could not tell him. She was used to thinking out her own problems and this wasn't a subject a man was competent to handle, anyway.

There was a window in her beautiful room overlooking the grounds at the back of the house. Somewhere over there, where the lights lay like masses of dropped stars, were the old familiar streets in which the captain and that awful simpleton, Brickdust Macaulay, were breaking their foolish hearts for "Rosyleen." And White Rose, standing there in the softest nook of fairyland, knew that she must go.

The white fur coat and hood arrived the day before Christmas, but Rosaline was not wearing them when she stepped stealthily out of the rear door of the mansion and scurried away in the dusk. She wore the only cheap thing she had been able to find in her new wardrobe, a blue print that the queen called her play-dress. She had left, in payment for it, a new silver quarter given her by a guest who was staying in the house. She hoped it was enough, for she wanted to leave everything fixed up square. That had been the business principle faithfully preached to her and Brickdust by the captain in the old business days, in the beginning of their career. She had nothing to pay for a coat even if all the outside garments provided by the queen had not been too expensive for her to wear in Snowdrop Court. But she had found an old silk opera cape which she had heard the queen tell her maid was to be thrown away. She had decided it would be all right to take that. It had a hood and, though it was not very warm, it was better than nothing, if only it hadn't dragged so in the rear when she held it up in front.

"I mustn't look back but just once," she said to herself as she came to the outer edge of the grounds. "I know Peter just went in to light up the tree and I'm afraid I couldn't stand it if—"

She caught her breath sharply. What vision was this, glimmering on her from that great window? A tree of fire that towered, shining, to the ceiling; every branch heavy with magic fruit, every twig a-blossom with lights and a-fire with color! She couldn't help standing still to look. It seemed as if the tree were singing, there in the silence of the early dusk, a siren song about the warmth and love and light she was leaving. It would not take long for that music to drown the hail of the captain and his messmate, Brickdust, beating about on the far, cold seas of poverty.

She put her fingers in her ears and ran.

The better streets were filled with gay Christmas crowds. Rosaline had a suspicion that they were laughing at her hood, and she wondered why anybody ever made a cape of such cold and slippery material. She thrust an arm through the arm-hole to keep it from flying away.

Now she was in the frouzy streets she knew. Alas, for her castle of dreams and the magic spells of the Velvet Prince! After all, this was what she had come back to. For the last mile her feet dragged wearily and she panted for breath in spite of the cold. She pulled herself up with a disgusted air.

"You're soft," she told herself derisively; "that's what's the matter with you. It all comes o' having nothing to do like a gilt-edged kid in a bandbox." (Oh Rosaline, is the downy delight of that rose-lined mantle so soon forgotten?)

The captain's room was on the ground floor and his lamp was lighted. It looked cold and pinched inside, and Rosaline's sharp eyes instantly made out, even through the dirt on the window, sundry lapses from domestic virtue on the part of her successor. Brickdust was languidly scraping herring bones into the stove, the dish-cloth wound round his arm like a badge.

But the captain,—ah, the captain! It was patent at a glance that the mullygrubs were upon him. His crutches were flung on the floor, and his head rested heavily in his hands. Angel McGrath stood over him, evidently trying to comfort him with Scripture. Words came rolling out into the night like an organ peal:

"Your house is left unto you desolate."

"Shut up, Angel," commanded Rosaline, walking into the room and taking the captain's gray head in her arms as if she were his mother. "Don't you see I've come back and everything's all right?"

It was so long before they could bring the captain to a full realization of what was going on around him that the Prince, (who had appeared suddenly out of the night, a very white-faced and anxious Peter, at first, but much relieved and full of agreeable plans as soon as he had made sure of the safety of his White Rose), had had time to quite transform the room. The captain rubbed his hands dreamily at the sight of the big fire in the old stove, the rickety table heaped high with cheer, and even a makeshift Christmas tree in one corner.

"You done splendid, my girl!" he murmured.

And though his mentor hastened to assure him with emphasis that it was all the work of his rival, the Velvet Prince, the captain still seemed to hold fast to his opinion that all the warmth and light and joy had come back with "Rosyleen."

Next month: BY SUBTERFUGE, *by H. P. Holt,* a story of a treasure hunt, a mutinous crew, and a captain who seemed destined to be a soldier of misfortune.

PUTTING ONE OVER ON ADAM

BY LELAND S. CHESTER

Shorthorn cattle and Berkshire hogs are not the only victims of the meat packing industry. Frequently the packer himself is slaughtered and cured. The particular packer in this story belonged to the ham family anyway.

EORGE BAKER, of the Baker & Gordon Provision Company, entered the firm's offices after a discouraging week on the road to find his partner slumped in a swivel chair, one eye squinted at the blank wall and a pucker of annoyance on his broad forehead. Plainly, Henry Gordon was worried, an unusual state of mind with that ponderous, easy going fellow.

"Well, how goes it, Henry?" greeted Baker, with a joviality he was far from feeling.

The swivel chair groaned as Henry Gordon swung his elephantine bulk to face his partner.

"Look at this, George," he said, taking up a long sheet of paper covered with neatly arranged figures and holding it out. It was the report for their fiscal year, ending September the thirtieth, two days before. "We've lost, on an average, five hundred dollars a month since March and barely broke even the preceding six months. George, we're sinking fast."

Baker threw his traveling bag into a corner and sat down. Despite his attempted cheerfulness, his expression was gloomy. He took the report and went over it carefully.

"Worse than I thought," he said at length. "Looks as though old Adam means to go the limit, don't it?"

Henry Gordon sat for a time squinting out over the traffic-filled street below his window. His brow puckered and smoothed alternately, and he kept whacking the broad arm-rest of his chair with a pudgy, grease-soaked hand. His mind was as slow and unwieldy as his body, and usually it required a great deal of thought for him to arrive at the simplest of conclusions.

"He can't be more than breaking even himself," he speculated after a time. "What does the old fool mean, anyhow?"

"To break us, of course," said Baker promptly. "Our White Lily has been cutting in too deep on his Superior trade recently. He wants to get us out of the way. He can sell his cured stuff at a loss indefinitely and depend on the profit from his by-product to hold him up. Having to buy our stuff ready dressed puts us at his mercy. To be frank with you, Henry, I'm getting discouraged."

"And ain't there no way to get back at him?" was Henry Gordon's vague query. He was only the bone and muscle of the business. He could captain the plant's working force and do two men's labor besides, but in all other matters he relied upon his more nimble-witted partner.

"I'm afraid not, Henry," replied Baker. "Of course, if we were equipped for slaughtering, we could fight him till he's blue in the face. But that's out of the question. We're not, and can't begin to raise the money to do it."

Henry Gordon sighed like a grampus and heaved himself out of his chair.

"Well," he said, "I've got to put that shipment of green hams in pickle, bust or no bust." He held out his hand. "This thing's up to you, George. It's too deep for me. But whatever you say goes, and I'm with you to the last dollar."

"Sure. I know," said Baker heartily. "And if we do sink, we'll go down side by side."

Then the partners shook hands and big-bodied, big-hearted Henry Gordon lumbered out of the office.

To them that handshake was a sacred thing. There were no other forms of agreement. There were no articles of partnership, no written terms and conditions. When they went into business they simply combined their brains, energy and capital, then shook hands and went to work. And in the years that had followed, that simple token of faithfulness had held them closer together than all the written contracts in existence.

George Baker and Henry Gordon were almost of an age,—somewhere about forty,—and had begun as retail butchers fifteen years before. Now they owned a modern curing plant, prepared their own products, and did an exclusive jobbing business. Commercial agencies rated them at forty to fifty thousand, credit A 1.

They were located in a town of twenty-five thousand, and in addition to their city patronage supplied a trade some forty miles inland. Their only local competitor was the Adam Holt Packing Company, a one hundred thousand dollar corporation, equipped for slaughtering as well as curing. Of course, the big Chicago houses came in for the bulk of the business; but the local concerns had established a more or less loyal patronage and in spite of their mammoth rivals continued to prosper.

Up to a year before, the two local firms had apparently been on the most amiable terms. Then, as the Baker & Gordon Provision Company's White Lily brand hams and bacon grew more and more in favor and the sale of the Adam Holt Packing Company's Superior declined, the latter firm began to slash prices. Of course the Chicago houses paid no attention to this, but the effect on Baker & Gordon was disastrous.

After his partner had left the office, George Baker lighted his pipe, leaned back in his chair, and pondered the situation. At the present rate, he knew they could not last long. The new plant had practically exhausted their surplus and it would be worse than folly to borrow good money to send after bad. An hour's meditation developed nothing but a slight headache; so he called in a stenographer and dictated a letter to the trade, explaining that he would be unable to visit them the following week, but would appreciate their mail or 'phone orders.

This latter statement was a courteous falsehood. The truth of the matter was that he did not want their orders. At the prices he was compelled to quote, each shipment constituted a ruinous loss.

The next day was Sunday and the partners did not see each other. Monday morning they were both at the plant promptly at seven o'clock, as usual. George Baker was philosopher enough to believe there is a way out of all difficulties if one can but think of it, and he spent the greater portion of the morning trying to evolve some plan by which to circumvent the aims of their ruthless competitor. He was still deeply occupied when, at about eleven-thirty, an imitation racing car drew up outside and young Benny Miles entered the office.

Benny Miles was a young prodigal known to George Baker by sight and reputation only. Benny was called a sport. He derived a comfortable income from some mysterious source and dispersed it with a lavish hand. He was about twenty-five, wore clothes of the latest English cut, the most freakish products shoe and shirt manufacturers could turn out and went bare headed, except in zero weather.

He introduced himself and slid unbidden into a vacant chair.

"Well, how's the meat business, Mr. Baker?" he opened casually.

"Good enough," lied Baker. "We have no kick coming."

"Uh, huh! just what I thought," observed Benny mysteriously, "just what I thought." He hitched his chair nearer. "Say, I'd like to ask you a question if you don't mind. Is Chicago competition hurting you any?"

"Not in the least," replied Baker, somewhat puzzled. "Why?"

"I'll tell you why," said Benny, leaning forward and squinting one eye. "I'm a stockholder in the Adam Holt Packing Company—two hundred shares—twenty thousand dollars—and it hasn't paid a dividend for more than a year. Before that we always got fifteen to twenty per cent. Now he says Chicago competition

is driving us to the wall. I don't know what his game is, but whatever it is, it's crooked. I'm going to sell out."

Within the next thirty seconds, George Baker did some fast thinking. When he replied he was tingling all over.

"Adam is right, Mr. Miles," he said. "Competition has been something fierce for the past year. We're losing money every month. I didn't tell you at first because I thought it was none of your business; but being financially interested, you're entitled to know the true conditions. Your firm hasn't paid dividends for the simple reason that it hasn't made the money to pay them with."

Benny was vastly worried. His income, which had been anywhere from three to four thousand a year, had completely vanished. He had been forced to forego accustomed luxuries, and even the barest necessities were becoming a problem. He needed money and needed it urgently. Before he left, he had told all he knew about the Adam Holt Packing Company; and, considering the nature of that knowledge, it was a great deal.

That afternoon, Baker called his partner to the office. His mind had been working hard and fast and a big idea, though still vague, had begun to buzz and clamor in the back of his head.

"Henry," he said, "I think I see Adam's game. Benny Miles was here this morning and spilled a lot of information. Benny holds two hundred shares of Adam's stock and it hasn't paid a dividend for more than a year. Adam tells the stockholders it's Chicago competition. Got 'em scared stiff. And when I saw how things were, I told Benny competition was ruining us also. But I didn't say Chicago competition; I just let him think so.

"Now I've got it figured this way, Henry: Adam's trying to shoot two guns at once. He's trying to break us and get control of our White Lily trade-mark, and at the same time run his own stock so low that he can buy it in at a mere fraction of its value. There are only five stockholders besides himself, according to what Benny says, and not one of them knows enough to call his hand.

"Of course I may be wrong about his designs on the stockholders, but it's plain as daylight that he's trying to break us. Anyhow, I've got a scheme to find out what he wants. I'm going to make a small deposit with the Broad Street Trust Company, check it right out again, and in a week or so borrow a few thousand. Adam's one of its directors and of course he'll learn of it. Then, if I'm right, he'll think we're on our last legs and begin to feel us out."

"But," ventured Henry, "we'd be paying interest on money we don't need. Would that be good business?" This was not a protest; merely a habit of Henry's.

"It may and it may not be. But we won't know till we try it. If I'm right we'll at least know where we stand. If I'm wrong I'll put the stockholders onto him and advise them what to do."

Henry Gordon considered this.

"And what if you're right?"

"Have to figure that out later," returned Baker. "What do you think of the plan so far, Henry?"

"Whatever you say goes," responded Henry with genuine feeling.

The days that followed were anxious ones for George Baker. Immediately after the talk with his partner he made a small deposit with the Broad Street Trust Company, and a week later arranged for a five thousand dollar loan for thirty days on their joint note. Then to make their position appear more crucial he allowed two large bills to fall due, and when payment was requested directed the creditors to make draft through the Broad Street Trust. When the drafts were presented he refused to honor them and forthwith mailed checks drawn on their regular bank, explaining that drafts should have been made through the Second National.

In the meantime he stuck close to the office and did not visit the trade. Instead, he mailed out quotations so far above the Adam Holt Packing Company's prices that few orders were received. That was what he had hoped would happen, for even at the advanced figures there was no profit for the firm. Stock in the curing vats was an asset; but the moment it

left the plan it became a liability.

When the note fell due, Adam Holt had not shown his hand. So Baker called at the Broad Street Trust, requested a thirty day extension and made application for an additional five thousand for a like period. The details were consummated with such unctuous readiness that for a moment he was suspicious. But almost immediately the feeling gave way to one of elation. It seemed to indicate that at least Adam was nibbling the bait.

However, for the next three weeks nothing happened. The Adam Holt Packing Company continued to sell at bankruptcy prices. Baker & Gordon did little business, for they had determined that nothing should go out of their plant that would not at least allow them to break even. Still, the volume was so small that, on the whole, they lost money.

Then, just one week before the enlarged note fell due, the partners received a caller in the person of Adam Holt. Adam Holt was a pursy little man of about fifty-five, whose most prominent features were his yellow goatee and aggressive eyebrows. When he talked he reminded one of a spitting tom cat.

"I know just how you fellows are fixed," he opened, without preliminary; "so don't beat about the bush. You're ready to throw up your hands and go down for the last time. But, if you've got sense, I'll help you out. Twenty-five thousand for your stock, brand, and a ten-year lease on your plant. Talk fast and don't try to bluff."

Henry Gordon's two hundred and ninety pounds avoirdupois squirmed perceptibly. He opened his mouth to speak, but George Baker forestalled him with a sharp wink.

"Mr. Holt," said Baker, "you evidently got your information from a very unreliable source. Our business is in a very satisfactory condition."

"Is it?" snorted Adam. "Then how about that ten-thousand-dollar note coming due next week? How about those drafts you couldn't pay? Why have you quit calling on your trade?"

Instantly, George Baker's expression underwent a change. His eyes popped and his jaws sagged. He had the appearance of a man cornered. He rose nervously.

"W-why," he stammered, "the lease alone is worth that. And we've got at least ten thousand dollars' worth of stock in cure. You—you'd be robbing us."

"That's my price," said Adam. "Take it or let it alone."

"But you'll give us time to think it over, won't you?" asked Baker.

"Till next Thursday," was the curt reply. "That's when your note falls due; and, take it from me, gentlemen, the bank is going to need money about that time. Come to my office when you're ready."

When the door had closed on their visitor Henry Gordon turned a startled face to his partner. "Well, I guess he's got us, George."

George Baker laughed. "Well, I guess he hasn't. You forget, Henry, that we have that ten thousand on deposit with the Second National, and that we paid those bills by check. I've found out what I want to know and now I'll get busy. I think we can hand old Adam a package that will make him roll over on his back and yelp like a whipped puppy. We still have six thousand of our own money. Care if I spent some of it?"

"You're welcome to my half," said Henry. "And the other half is yours."

Immediately, thereafter, George Baker's movements took on an air of mystery. That afternoon he sought Benny Miles and the two spent a full hour in conference at Benny's club. Then he visited a telegraph office where he filed a message for immediate transmission, and went home. Round ten o'clock next morning, a young man of about thirty, with a rather wide, determined mouth and steely gray eyes, alighted from a taxi in front of the leading hotel, entered, registered, and went at once to his room. Apparently, he was a man of some importance. A few minutes later, George Baker approached the desk, glanced carelessly over the register, and strolled toward the elevator.

This was Friday morning. Friday afternoon he was at the plant as usual. Saturday he was there. Henry Gordon, lumbering into the office now and then, wondered what his partner saw on the blank wall

to make him grin. Two or three times Baker answered the telephone and held a brief conversation, meanwhile chuckling gleefully into the receiver.

Monday this was repeated. Tuesday the same. Wednesday afternoon, about two-thirty, he answered the telephone, slapped his thigh, yelled "Good boy!" into the receiver, grabbed his hat and departed in joyful haste. As he hurried down the street, big Henry Gordon watched him from a window, his wide brow knotted perplexedly.

It was ten o'clock the next morning before Baker returned to the plant. There was a marked buoyancy to his step. His face was ruddy; just one broad, exultant smile. He clapped Henry Gordon on the shoulders and rocked him perilously on his tremendous feet.

"Henry, old man," he said triumphantly, "we've done it. We've put one over on Adam that will make him curl up and beg for mercy. The only thing I'm afraid of now is that he'll die of apoplexy. He pushed the astonished Henry into a chair and sat down beside him.

"You remember, Henry," he went on, "Adam gave until today to either sell or sink. Well, we're going to sell."

"Sell?" Henry Gordon's mouth came open and he leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Yes; but wait a minute. There's more to it than that. We need his money only for about half an hour. Then he'll sell back to us and pay handsomely for the privilege.

"You see," he explained, "when Benny Miles was here he fairly boiled over with information. He knew there were one thousand shares of stock of the par value of one hundred thousand dollars. He knew he held two hundred of them and who held the rest. But he didn't know in what proportions. However, he was positive that Adam didn't have a controlling interest. That's when the big idea smote me. So I had our attorney find out how things stood and what sort of people the stockholders were.

"Here's his confidential opinion of the whole bunch, including Adam:

"'Adam Holt, 350 shares; would boil a sheep tick for its tallow. Benny Miles, 200 shares; has a brain about the size and substance of a dried pea; never earned a dollar in his life. Miss Agatha Newcombe, 150 shares; old maid worth perhaps a hundred thousand dollars; would rather trust to Providence than pay attorney fees. Jacob Stemler, 150 shares; prosperous stockman; expert breeder of Shorthorn cattle and berkshire hogs, but knows little else. August Lentz, 100 shares; earned his money working in a brewery; wants to get hold of it and buy a farm. Mrs. Lucy Peeler, 50 shares; widow; hasn't another dollar in the world.'

"Just the sort Adam knew it would be easy to take advantage of," Baker went on. "The stock was originally worth only fifty, but nine years ago, while Benny's father was alive, and before Adam had things his own way, the company increased its capital to one hundred thousand, doubled the par value of the shares and made the holders a present of it by way of a special dividend. That sort of stuck in Adam's craw, I reckon, and he made up his mind to get even. He meant to wait till he had us sewed up then hustle out and buy in the stock at about twenty-five.

"I decided to beat him to it. I felt Benny out and learned that the stockholders had held an indignation meeting, during which they had unanimously condemned Adam to the eternal roasting pan. They couldn't see through his game, but were sure it was crooked. Benny said they would all be tickled to death to get out with the original investment. However, I knew it would not do for me to try to buy it myself, so I wired Billy Markley to come up from Cincinnati and put it over for me. Billy's my cousin, you know. He's in the brokerage business and knows the stock game from A to Z. I merely outlined the situation and let him plan his own line of attack.

"He's a regular Field Marshal, Billy is. He went out among the stockholders and intimated that he might be a representative of the trust—didn't say so, you understand, but sort of left that impression—and meant to get control of the Adam Holt

Packing Company at a fair price or put it out of business. They fell all over themselves to unload at fifty. He got a ten per cent. option for thirty days on all but Mrs. Lucy Peeler's fifty shares. The certificates are with the Second National where we're to pay the remaining twenty-seven thousand within ten days. Pretty smooth work, eh, Henry?"

"Good Lord!" gasped Henry. "How are we to raise twenty-seven thousand dollars in ten days? And what would we do with the stock if we had it?"

Baker answered the last question first. "Sell it to Adam. But we'll sell him our business first. We'll take his check for fifteen thousand and let him assume our obligation with the Broad Street Trust. Then with the ten thousand we borrowed and the three thousand in our checking account, we'll have more than enough. I've already called up Adam and accepted his proposition. We're to be at his office at one-thirty this afternoon to close the deal."

Henry Gordon had implicit faith in his partner, but all this was too intricate for his slow-moving mental arrangement.

"But, George," he speculated vaguely, "he'll own our plant."

"And we'll own controlling interest in his. Leave it to me, Henry, and don't you worry."

At one-thirty sharp, George Baker and Henry Gordon arrived at Adam Holt's office. Adam was awaiting them. His attorney was there also. The four exchanged perfunctory greetings and sat down at a table previously arranged for the occasion.

Thirty minutes later, Adam Holt held a clean bill of sale for all stock in the Baker & Gordon plant, a ten-year lease on the plant and equipment, and owned the White Lily trade-mark. In return, Baker & Gordon had a certified check for fifteen thousand dollars, and Adam Holt's agreement to assume their obligation at the Broad Street Trust, which was due that afternoon.

"Well, boys, no hard feelings, I hope," said Adam, in an unusually gracious manner, and held out his hand.

Henry Gordon merely touched it. George Baker shook it heartily.

"None whatever," assured Baker. "It was a fair fight in which you won. I'm sure you'd feel the same if it were the other way."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed Adam. "It's all in the game, gentlemen, all in the game."

A block from the Adam Holt Packing Company's office a gray taxi stood purring at the curb. When George Baker and Henry Gordon came abreast of it, an odd thing happened. Baker grasped his astonished and somewhat dazed partner by the shoulders, shoved him into the car, sprang in himself, and the machine sped away without orders.

Five minutes later, it drew up in front of the Broad Street Trust. Baker alighted and walked briskly into the building. He presented Adam Holt's check for fifteen thousand and demanded currency. The cashier was inclined to be argumentative, but Baker shut him off slangily: "Cut the stall, sport. You know that check's good. You certified it yourself. And you know I'm Baker of Gordon & Baker. Now get busy."

The next stop was at the Second National. There, according to a prearranged schedule, he turned over the fifteen thousand in currency, with the firm's check for twelve thousand, and after a brief delay, in which some papers were signed and passed to him he went out and again entered the taxi. In less than three-quarters of an hour from the time they left Adam Holt's office they were back again.

"Well, well! What now?" demanded Adam, as they entered his private office unannounced.

"Adam," said George Baker, grinning broadly, "you think you're a wise old owl; but really you're the easiest bird I ever tried to pick. We just dropped in to buy our business back and let you pay us for our trouble."

Adam Holt's round little eyes opened wide for an instant, then crinkled at the corners and he smiled.

"I don't get you," he said; "but I'll just hold things up till I do." He reached for the telephone.

"No use, old man," grinned Baker. "You

can't stop payment on that check. I put it through ten minutes after I left here. I didn't get New York exchange for your bank to hold up either; I got the cash.

"Now listen, Adam. We were onto you two months ago. We knew you were trying to break us and at the same time rob your stockholders. You should have been wise enough to get a controlling interest first. You let us beat you at your own game. We took a little flier in A. H. P. ourselves—six hundred shares. However, it's for sale again. And we're not hogs either. All we want is par. Tear up those papers we signed, pay our note at the Broad Street Trust, give us your check for thirty-five thousand, and the stock is yours. And yes; one more condition: buy poor old Mrs. Peeler's fifty shares at a hundred and ten. Otherwise, we call a special meeting and take charge ourselves."

Adam Holt sprang to his feet.

"You're a liar!" he shouted. "That bluff's too thin. You couldn't handle six hundred shares of our stock."

"Couldn't we?" grinned Baker. "Call up the Second National and find out. Finished paying for it with the check you gave us less than an hour ago."

Adam Holt bounced up and down the office raving inarticulately.

George Baker placed his watch face up on the table before him.

"Still par, Adam," he warned. "But she goes up a point a minute from now on. Take it or let it alone. But be a sport, anyhow. It's all in the game, Adam, all in the game."

Adam stopped and stared at the watch. Speech had deserted him. Fascinated, he watched the second hand jerk toward the sixty mark. When but five seconds were left of the minute that was to cost him six hundred dollars, he grasped the edge of the table and sat down.

"I—I'll take it!" he screamed; "I'll take it! You—you dirty cut-throats."

Two indigent soldiers, lying ill in a hosptial, wager on which will live the longer. The survivor, who is only sixty-nine, stakes out a new claim on life. He thinks that he will start prospecting for a girl he used to know just as soon as he attends to an investment of eight dollars and eighty-four cents. Read A REAL SPORT, *By Hapsburg Liebe* next month.

WIRELESS FROM CHEYENNE

BY GEORGE THOMAS ARMITAGE

A cowboy faces the problem of providing a Christmas present for his girl after losing his money and her invitation to a Christmas dinner at stud poker.

WHEN Cheyenne awoke, he cursed softly and rolled in disgust from his sougans. A bitter Montana wind was crying at the corner and a sharp December chillness filled the little shanty.

"I musta been plumb bugs," he muttered, tugging viciously at a boot. "Locoed clean through."

The hardened boots refused to go on. Stumping toward the stove, he kicked the wood-box in the path of his wobbling ankles. A protruding corner caught the end of his toe. He flopped on a shaky tomato-box stool.

"Darn my fool soul! S'pose everything's gota go wrong now. Why didn't I quit winner?"

Like a dream, the cow-puncher saw again that green-topped table in the rear of Shawmut's one and only saloon. Stacks of chips and littered cards danced before his eyes. He smelled once more the smoked kerosene light, throwing dim shadows through the clouds of smoke. Involuntarily he reached out to rake in the "pot" as each "busted" cowboy cursed his luck, and continually Cheyenne's pile of colored chips had grown and he had dreamed of diamond necklaces and ruby rings for Carrie Ryan. Then came Jimmie Rowman with the slippery fingers and the cynical smile, and then —and then that awful ride home at sunrise—broke; in debt to the saloon; his two months' salary all shot to pieces.

Cheyenne snatched up a pine stick and whistled listlessly for a moment, then he whittled wildly; the knife slipped, and cut, and he cussed some more. Dejectedly he blew a tiny, flickering flame into a blaze. When the thin sheet iron began to glow, he put on the wash basin to thaw.

"I ken savvey how I sluffed all my kale," he marveled audibly, "but how I ever got nuts enough ta stake my invitation ta that Christmas dinner against his gets me. Rowman sure knew what he wanted and he got it, d——n him, even if he did have ta stack the cards. Gad, but if I only could 've caught him at it!"

Lanky, hardened fingers clutched the vinegar bottle as if it were the imaginary neck of the hated rival, then dropped helplessly to the remorseful puncher's side.

"What's the use of livin', anyhow?" he groaned, wearily.

A spirit of despondency suddenly changed to an outbreak of wrath; he cursed himself, stud poker, the outfit, and everything worthy of mention, but what was the use? He was stung, and the Christmas vacation was on the blink.

Too disheartened to cook, he brewed a pot of coffee and gulped down tin after tin of the black, unsweetened juice, in sympathetic companionship with many soothing cigarettes. Suddenly his melancholy thoughts were stopped by a sharp "O-ho." He shuffled up quickly and swung open the door. Watt McDool, the boss, loped in from the gate, leading a big, blaze-faced sorrel.

"What ya doin' with my Cracker Jack?" Cheyenne greeted the ranch head.

"Caught him in Trail Gulch last night, hittin' straight fer the Basin."

Cracker Jack poked an apologetic snout into his master's arms.

"Don't see how he got out," said Cheyenne. "He was safe on Fish Creek yesterday, and all the gates were solid."

"Sure. What's a gate to him? You'll lose a good pony, lettin' him run loose

without a scratch. I've told ya often enough to stick your mark on him. Some day he won't come back."

The warning over, McDool said, "Doc's comin' up to ride line for ya 'till New Years."

Cheyenne's hand dropped from the curly mane. He hesitated, then blurted determinedly, "I'm not a-goin', Watt."

McDool stared, unbelievingly. "Not a-goin'! What's up?"

"Why—a—I don't wanta go."

"Money ain't worrying ya?" the boss asked. "I can fix that."

Cheyenne thought for one fleeting instant: "I could get all the cash I wanted from him, all right—but I've lost my invite."

He could hardly tell Watt about the affairs of the heart and the ridiculous finish of a Christmas invitation.

"Nope, 'tain't that. Much obliged, but I've gota plenty," he lied.

"All right, I've gota be hittin' back. Cut yer water holes every day and ride line pretty close. If those old cows ever get ta driftin', they're gonners, sure." Watt never wasted his breath. There was a flapping of stirrups and he was gone.

Cheyenne put Cracker Jack in the barn and saddled his only other winter mount, Dynamite, for the day's work. "That scatter-brained Watt probably run the devil outa Cracker Jack on the trail," he told Dynamite as an excuse for his favorite.

All day the saddened cowboy automatically turned drifting cows back into protecting coulees and chopped the ice from their drinking places. The cold penetrated his woolly chaps and heavy sheepskin; tiny icicles rattled at the pony's nose, but Cheyenne's thoughts were elsewhere.

"That old rascal, Cracker Jack, he'd been clear to Carrie's if Watt hadn't stopped him. No wonder, the way she petted him and gave him apples and candy and stuff. I oughta brand him, I guess, but I promised her— D——n that Jimmie Rowman.

"Stand up, ya old fool!" Dynamite snorted in terror, and slipped on the ice when a big cotton-tail darted from the sage-brush.

"He thinks he's some swell, and he's so all-fired nice to her— Gad, but didn't she like to ride old Cracker Jack! Wouldn't take him though, for a present," he mused along; "said he was my best friend. 'Bout right, too."

Cheyenne suddenly quirted a spurt of life into the plodding Dynamite and settled back to his dreams.

"Jimmie'll sure have both boots under that Christmas dinner, and me invited two months ago, too, and said I'd come. He'll soak half his cash on a present for her—and me—and me not even sendin' her a note."

The meditating cowpuncher twisted his frost-numbed face as he pictured his rival crouched by that big fireplace.

"I know he's crooked, but Lord, I'd never dare tell her that. A poor bronco fighter like me's got no chance on $50 a month and keep. Rowman's got scads of 'dough' and horses— But, hell, I just *gota* send that girl a present."

To the Ryan ranch was a two days' ride and Cheyenne knew he was to be at the river camp every day. He'd turned down his proffered substitute; he'd staked his invitation in one wild, desperate throw; he'd practically given his word of honor and there was nothing to do but to eat bitter beef alone for Christmas.

All the way back to the cabin and all that night he planned and counter-planned. But his last decision, when he finally closed his eyes in the lonesome cabin that night, was still the same. Rowman would go to the Christmas dinner, send all the presents, probably marry the girl, and Cheyenne powerless to hinder.

Cheyenne awoke early the next morning and lay for some time reviewing the strange dream of the night before. Suddenly he sat up blinking.

"Whoop-ee-ky-o-tee!" he yelled, kicking back the tarp with no regard for the freezing atmosphere. "Powder River! I'm a two-year-old! I'll kick the ante my last bean before the draw and stand pat if it kills me!"

He celebrated by cooking a grand feed of oatmeal and flap-jacks and bacon, interspersed with java and spuds. Afterward, he dived into his war sack for a moment, then hurried to the barn. Inside he dis-

appeared for almost five minutes to emerge again, leading Cracker Jack and Dynamite.

"This sure tickles me," he mumbled jubilantly, blowing the frost from the bridle bit. The heavy Visalia saddle was cinched on the humped back of shivering Dynamite. Clear to the top of the divide, through the last gate, he led the wondering Cracker Jack. On the open range, he pulled off the hackamore and gave his favorite mount a parting slap.

"To the Basin, old man."

Cracker Jack trotted out a few feet, then turned back, and stood as though undecided. Cheyenne laughed sadly and pulled an automatic from his chaps. Eight shots cracked sharply in the air. Before the last shell had exploded, the horse was bounding down the road. Through the snow he galloped swiftly for a moment, then gradually slowed to a long, easy jog. Cheyenne watched him until he had disappeared around the rim of rocks in the direction of the Yellowstone country.

"So long, old boy. Hope I'll get ya back some day."

For almost half a day Cracker Jack jogged sturdily down the road to the Basin. In the early afternoon, on Comanche Creek, when the sun was dazzling bright, he pricked up suddenly at two horsemen trotting ahead. As they reined out, he tossed his head and cantered majestically between them. He had never seen Jimmie Rowman, neither had Rowman ever seen Cracker Jack, or a handsomer horse. The men scanned each side closely as the big sorrel swung past, and looked questioningly at each other.

"Where'n hell's that horse goin'?" ejaculated the surprised Rowman. "Let's take a look at him, just fer luck." Both wheeled and rode Cracker Jack down.

"Not a mark on this side, Shorty," said Rowman.

"Same here," from Shorty.

"Throw him inta the 'Y. T.' corrals," ordered Shorty's boss promptly.

A sharp chase over slippery rocks and snow-hidden badger holes landed the snorting Cracker Jack in the horse corral, two miles down the canyon. Rowman took down his lasso and Shorty shut the gate. As the captured gelding raced excitedly around the corral, the roper carelessly swung his lariat and wheeled his mount in the center.

Suddenly there was a swish and a slide. With a snort of terror, Cracker Jack reared, only to find his two front legs fast in a loop, thrown by Rowman's expert hand. There was a twank as the rope snapped taut, a thud, a squeal, and some flying snow. Before the jolted sorrel could get his breath, Shorty was twisting the quivering nostrils into the air, and Rowman had slipped from his saddle to flip a double half-hitch around the objecting rear legs. Again they searched from jaw to hoof, but found no sign of a brand.

"Swellest slick I ever saw," admired Rowman. "It's a shame to take the money. We'll have to go easy, though, fer those saddle marks and never-slips show he's some cowboy's top horse."

"He's sure some maverick," admired Shorty, viewing the dilating nostrils and heaving ribs.

Rowman collected some dry wood and untied an iron branding ring from his cantle. "You beat it up on that little knowl and keep your eyes peeled for visitors," he directed. "I'll do the rest."

When Shorty rode down at a call, he found the familiar "B—" (Bee Bar) seared in the red flesh of a quivering animal; also a little smoke from a recent fire and an odor of burnt hair.

"Cut out for the Big Dry country," Rowman ordered, coiling his raw-hide. "Sell him for a hundred and fifty when the brand's dry if you get a chance."

Shorty took the proffered halter. "Where'll I find you?"

Rowman winked slyly. "I'll be married by that time. Look fer me at the Ryan ranch."

Shorty jogged off, leading the humbled Cracker Jack. Rowman aimed for the Basin, thinking of a happy Christmas.

"That horse'll just about pay my weddin' bill," he mused gleefully. Then his face hardened when he thought of Cheyenne, of whom Carrie talked so much, but he soon dismissed the rival from his mind. "Since

I got the poor boob off from the Christmas visit, his goose is cooked. He's got no chance now. He couldn't buy one horse like that pony back there, and I've got dozens."

Long before the mince meat was in the oven, Jimmie Rowman's silver mounted spurs jingled on the Ryan doorstep. Carrie greeted him cordially.

"Have you seen Cheyenne?" She looked anxiously down the ravine. "He ought to be here by now."

"Nope," was the short response. "Don't think he's comin'."

When all the pans and kettles were emitting characteristic Christmas odors in the low, log-timbered mansion and every "innard" in the bunkhouse was trembling for fear that there wouldn't be enough goose for himself, Carrie grew impatient.

"I knew he wouldn't come," bragged the rival, who knew more than she.

"If Cheyenne doesn't care enough to be here, he needn't think I will."

The disappointed girl tried to hide her chagrin by stroking once more an expensive set of furs on the center table. "He might at least have sent me a little note, if not a present," she thought to herself. Then out loud, to the beaming Jimmie, she remarked, "You're really very good to me. We won't wait dinner any longer."

Ravishing ranch hands had scarcely assaulted the mountain of viands when a sharp clicking of iron shoes was heard out on the frozen ground.

Rowman stared; Carrie sprang up, joyfully, expecting Cheyenne. Instead, she saw Cracker Jack, covered with frosted foam, pawing at the gate.

Rowman cursed in silence. "I mighta known that fool Shorty'd lose him."

"Why, he's got your brand on, Jimmie," exclaimed the perplexed girl, "and it's still fresh!"

Unable to conceal his embarrassment, but never dreaming she had seen the horse before, he stammered out, "Yes—a—I—bought him from an Indian in the Pryor mountains a few days ago."

"You bought him! Why—that's—" Carrie hurried through the gate to her old pet. Cracker Jack whinnied recognition and lifted his foreleg toward her as if he would shake hands. The girl stroked his frosted nose with wrinkling forehead and puzzled eyes. Continually he pawed with his front hoof. Her wondering features suddenly cleared and she clapped her hands excitedly.

"I know! Give me a knife, and hold this poor pony's hoof." Then the surprised cowboys, and the still more amazed Rowman, saw her dig away the snow packed in the steel shoe, cut out a little tobacco bag and from a water-soaked piece of paper inside, read slowly:

"From Cheyenne to Carrie—A Merry Christmas."

Two days later, a deputy sheriff rode up to Cheyenne's cabin and handed him a note which read:

"I am so glad I remembered you once said you would send Cracker Jack to me some day with a message in his shoe. I thank you for the beautiful present. Will you come down to the Basin at once and prove he is mine? There is a big "B—" on his right shoulder, and Mr. Rowman is spending Christmas with the sheriff.

Another January story: THE TESTIFICATION OF CYNTHYAN ADAMS, *by Nathan Clover.* It is the story of a little girl who didn't want to testify at a revival meeting. She didn't believe she had any first-class blessings that she could drag forth and eulogize.

BUCK HENRY, DESERTER

BY HAPSBURG LIEBE

A hill man whose family is involved in a feud deserts the army to become the leader of his clan. Unfortunately his constitution is not strong enough to withstand the ravages of the germ called love; and the feud is allowed to languish.

COAST Artilleryman Jimmy Landon read the penciled scrawl, folded the flimsy sheet and gave it back to his friend; then he leaned forward in his chair and began to eye his friend sympathetically. The big, black-haired, brown-eyed fellow to whom the letter belonged frowned hard. He was one of those men who would rather be whipped than pitied and it was hard for him to draw a line between pity and sympathy. Buck Henry had come from Tennessee's mountains, and he was still a mountaineer at heart, in spite of his military training.

"So that's what has been eating on you all day—that letter from home," smiled Landon. "Tell me this, Bucky: Why do your people and their neighbors, the Murrells, want to fight like that?"

"They've always fought like that," muttered Buck Henry. "What it started over has been forgot long ago. They need me there, Jimmy. You see, there are many more Murrells than there are Henrys. And I've just got to go—I'm going home, Jimmy, sure."

"On furlough?"

"On furlough!" exclaimed Henry. "Now, when the post is already short-handed, and with the main big gun of all coming next week for a general inspection? You ought to know better, Jimmy! There's no chance of a furlough, of course." He lowered his voice a little. "I've got to desert, Jimmy. It's absolutely the only way."

"Desert!" Landon cried smotheredly, unbelievingly. His eyes narrowed, and his face became very grave. "*Desert!* You don't mean it, old top. You can't mean it!"

"You've soldiered with me for a long while," said Buck Henry; "you ought to know, by now, whether I mean what I say or not. If it was in times of war, I wouldn't do it; but now I will. I'm trusting you, Jimmy. I always could trust you. I know you won't tell. This is what I'm going to do tonight, Jimmy:

"I'm going to write a note to Captain Hodges and tell him I'm tired of life's little game, and that I've decided to drown myself. I'll leave a blouse and a hat down at the landing to bear out the tale. I wanted you to know, old pal, because I thought you'd feel bad about it if you thought I'd really drownded myself. You can throw out hints that some girl gave me the go-by; will you?"

Buck Henry meant it; that was sure. Nothing, no amount of persuasion, could change his intentions; and that, too, was sure. Landon had known the big Tennessean intimately for more than two years.

"I will, Bucky," said Jimmy Landon.

The papers of the following afternoon printed the sad, sad story of a handsome young artilleryman, one of the best soldiers in the service, who had drowned himself because his sweetheart, a beautiful Sicilian woman, had jilted him for a man who had more money. "As yet," said the papers, "the body has not been recovered."

Jimmy Landon had carried out his friend's wishes as well as his friend could have wished.

Deserter Buck Henry went into the rugged Big Laurel country wearing a broad-rimmed black felt hat, a blue flannel shirt and a black string tie, clay-colored corduroys and high, laced boots; he carried with him a new Winchester rifle and several hundred rounds of cartridges. It was al-

most sundown when he reached the rambling old home cabin on lower Bad Axe Creek. His mother met him at the door; she knew him readily, and she was the only one of his people who did.

"Buck, honey, thank goodness ye've come!" she said, putting out her old arms.

He embraced her, and kissed her, and she cried as mothers will.

"Whar's Pap?" he asked, speaking again in the drawling, musical dialect of his native hills, and he fell into it naturally, without even thinking about it.

"He's in the next room, honey," was the choking answer,—"in bed, shot. One o' the Murrells migh' nigh got him day afore yeste'day. But Doc Hankins says he'll make it, with good keer. Set yer gun down and go in thar to him, honey boy. He's been a-wishin' and a-wishin' yer'd come home and he'p us in our fight ag'in them Murrells."

The returned mountaineer put his gun in a corner and hastened into the next room and to the bedside of his badly wounded father. Old Ike Henry, leader of his clan, chosen king of his people, looked up somewhat dazedly.

"Pap," said Buck, "don't ye know me?"

"It—it ain't my son Buckner?" Old Ike muttered feverishly.

"Nobody else, Pap," smiled Buck. "How're ye afeelin', Pap?"

"A little like the boy the calf run over, I reckon," weakly. "Shot through and through. Old Patterson Murrell, he done it. My rifle failed—fust time I ever knowed it to fail. Old ca'tridge, I reckon. Tell me this, Buckner, I ax ye: What did ye come back home for, son?"

There was a great hope, and a great pride, in his deeply set old eyes. He wanted to be told that his son had come home to fight with his own flesh and blood against the old-time enemy, the Murrell clan. His son quickly gratified his wish.

"As soon as I'd read Sister Jane's last letter, I knowed I'd be needed here," said Buck.

Old Ike Henry smiled very happily. "Yore a good boy, shore. Ye allus was a good boy. Did ye have any trouble about gittin' loose from the army?"

"Not a bit. I desarted at night, and lit out for home like a skeered rabbit," laughed Buck. How nicely that old hill dialect came back to him! He gloried in it.

"Ye desarted!" the chief of the Henrys exclaimed breathlessly.

"It was the only way," hastily. "But I laid a plan by which to make 'em think I'd done drownded myself, and I'll have no trouble over it. Who's to be the leader whilst yore down, Pap?"

"Ye," answered Old Ike. "Ye, my oldest son. It's all right and proper, hain't it?"

"I reckon it is," thoughtfully. "Yes, I reckon it is."

The old mountaineer laced his gnarled fingers across his gaunt chest. "O' course," he said. "Ye've been gone a pow'ful long while, Buck, hain't ye? How long has it been, anyhow, son?"

"I dunno," and Buck Henry shrugged his shoulders. Ordinarily, the hill man takes little heed of the flight of time.

Old Ike closed his eyes. He seemed very tired. Buck Henry straightened and looked toward his mother, and noted then that there was a strange man in the room. His mother read his questioning glance a-right.

"This here is Hardman Gourley, Buck," she explained. "Hardman, he's been a-doin' consid'able spyin' for us. We find out through him what them thar Murrells is up to."

Hardman Gourley was a tall, lank, scrawnily bearded fellow in runover cowhide boots, brown jean trousers, a striped cotton shirt and a faded black slouch hat; he stepped forward and put out his hand. Buck Henry did not take it. He cordially disliked Hardman Gourley as soon as he saw him. Whatever else his shortcomings, Buck Henry was no hypocrite; he couldn't shake hands with a man whom he so cordially disliked, even for the sake of diplomacy.

"We'll not need yore spyin' in the future, Gourley," he said sharply. "I don't believe in spies, much. Do we owe ye anything for work done in the past?"

Gourley did not answer. He drew his slouch hat down tight on his bullet-shaped head, took up his rifle, and strode angrily from the cabin.

"What d'ye know about that!" laughed Buck.

"Ye'd oughtn't to said it, son," muttered Old Ike. "Gourley he'd done heerd ye tell 'at ye'd desarted from the army; and Gourley knows, jest like 'most everybody else knows, 'at the's a standin' reward out for any desarter. He may bring ye trouble."

"It'd be the dearest reward Hardman Gourley ever earned, Pap, ef he turned me up," declared young Henry. He went on, "I'll bet you forty dollars in gold ag'inst a goosequill toothpick that Hardman Gourley is reelly a spyin' for them Murrells! I don't know what makes me think it, Pap; but I shore am a-thinkin' it, anyhow."

The Henrys began to gather to see their returned kinsman, and the deserter was lionized. That night a merry old-fashioned hill dance was given at Jeptha Henry's cabin in honor of the new leader.

When serious, bearded Doc Hankins had finished dressing Old Ike's wound the following morning, he called Buck out to the cabin yard.

"Better be on yore toes, boy," he whispered. "Old Patterson Murrell told me yeste'day that he'd never rest ontel he'd druv every Henry by name out o' the Big Laurel section."

Buck Henry nodded. "Much obliged," he said. "But I'm allus on my toes, Doc; I sleep on my toes."

When four days had passed without the firing of a hostile rifle, the new chief of the Henry clan began to suffer because of the inactivity. He had come home to fight, and he wanted to fight and have it over with. Why were the Murrells waiting? Why didn't they begin their task of driving the Henrys from the Big Laurel section? Buck Henry was somewhat disgusted. He wanted to show his people that he was as efficient as a leader as his father had been before him.

Another day passed, and the young clan chief threw aside heavy thoughts and responsibilities, took up a cane fishing-rod and a dozen flies, and went down Bad Axe Creek for some trout-fishing.

After half an hour's walk through the cool, green, laurel-filled woodland, he reached a promising swirl made by the pouring in of Little Sunday Creek, a stream that ran by the settlement of the Murrells, and there he stopped and began to cast with a very good home-made brown tackle. He flicked the fly over the rippling surface with a hand that had not forgotten how. Just as he turned his eyes toward a flash of blue in the blooming laurels some thirty yards to his left, a speckled beauty struck with a sudden and vigorous splush!—lush!—ush! He jerked, missed, and tangled the flaxen line in the branches of a nearby beech—the old, old luck of men who fish in the woods.

"Puzzle," he smiled, chagrined: "What kind of a hook will ketch on anything but a fish's mouth? Answer: A fishhook!"

His mind went back to the flash of blue, and again he looked toward the blooming laurels that lay to his left. He saw better now; the blue was the blue of a calico dress, and its wearer was a bareheaded and barefooted nymph of the wood—a smiling and beautiful, strong-limbed and willowy young woman, who moved with all the sure grace of a doe, and whose eyes were big and clear and as brown as a topaz. Just as Buck Henry had disliked Hardman Gourley at first sight, just so did Buck Henry now love this wild young creature as soon as his gaze found her.

But—she might be one of the hated Murrells! He knew that he was not far from the settlement of the Murrells.

He left his cane rod hanging by its tangled flaxen line and went toward the girl. She was following something with all the sly stealth of one long accustomed to the woods and the things of the woods. Henry ran after her silently, determined to make her acquaintance, determined to know her, his charmer. There was, of course, one chance in a dozen that she was not a Murrell. Then he heard her laugh aloud, and it thrilled him to the heart; it was like the rippling of Little Sunday Creek, and as merry as the laughter of a delighted child.

Soon he saw that which she was following: a young owl, barely full-feathered, just able to fly from one tree to another.

"Ye rascal!" she cried. "Ye cute little rascal!"

The baby owl flew on through the thick green forest, and the girl followed relentlessly. Then the brown ball disappeared in a hole in the face of a high and rugged gray cliff.

"That's whar it was hatched out at," the girl said to herself, and Buck Henry heard her.

"Yes," quietly said Henry, walking toward her with his head bared, "that's shore whar it was hatched out at. That's its home."

The nymph turned quickly, blushing; she looked down, then she looked up and smiled very sweetly.

"Want me to ketch it for ye?" asked Henry.

"No," answered the young woman, still smiling sweetly. "No; never mind. I'm shore much obleeged to ye though, jest the same. Are ye from roundabouts here anywhars?"

"I'm from the Atlantic Coast."

"The Atlantic Coast?" inquiringly. "Is it a mountain, or a creek, or—or what?"

"It's the bank of the sea," said Buck Henry—"the bank of the big, big, deep, wide sea."

"What's yore name?" she asked.

"John Doe," with twinkling eyes. It didn't sound like an outright lie. He had his reasons, of course, for the deception. "What's yores, may I ax?"

"Alice Otterbine," readily.

Buck Henry was mightily pleased. A love affair with a Murrell would have been exceedingly difficult for him, a Henry, and the chosen leader of the Henry clan.

He spent an hour with her that day, and when he left her he walked as a man in a dream of enchantment. Never before had he seen a girl who was so simply sweet, so pretty and so captivating and so real.

The Murrells showed no hostile sign during the week that followed, and young Henry met his nymph at the gray cliff frequently. He said nothing of it to his people, not even to his mother; the mountaineer is fond of keeping such things a profound secret until the day of his wedding, at least. He had not yet told Alice that he had given her a false name. It worried him a great deal. At first, it had sounded rather funny; but now it sounded distressingly like a lie. For generations back the Henrys had hated lies and the tellers thereof.

In a desperate moment, Buck Henry decided that he would marry Alice Otterbine—provided, of course, she would have him—and then tell her the whole truth. It did not occur to him that the minister who officiated at the wedding would have to use his proper name publicly in order that the wedding might be legitimate.

He proposed bluntly, in true mountaineer fashion, while they sat together on a moss-covered log that lay at the base of the rugged gray cliff. Alice turned her face away; instead of blushing with happiness, she had gone a little white.

"I'd allus love ye jest as I love ye now," he vowed.

"Maybe ye would," murmured Alice; "but—"

"I'd allus be good to ye," he went on earnestly.

"Maybe ye would," murmured Alice; "but—"

"But what?" he asked.

"But nothin'!" cried Alice.

She suddenly flung her arms around his neck, kissed him tearfully, rose and ran swiftly through the woodland.

"Come back, honey!" called Buck Henry, rising. "Come back!"

The girl halted at the sound of his voice. She put her hands to her throat as though she were about to smother; then she faced toward her sweetheart, and cried out desperately:

"Meet me at Preacher Atchley Budder's at ten o'clock in the mornin', with a marriage license, and I'll marry ye, John Doe!"

Preacher Atchley Budder lived seven miles away, in the foothills.

Buck Henry went homeward with his heart throbbing wildly with joy. Tomorrow she would be his own—she would be his own forever, always, always his own. Ordinarily, the hill man takes little heed of the flight of time; but now Buck Henry counted the hours that lay, a barrier, between him and the greatest happiness that mankind ever knows.

Serious, bearded Doc Hankins was dress-

ing his father's wound when he reached the old home cabin. When Old Ike saw his eldest son, the son that he himself had named as his successor, he struggled to a sitting posture in his bed, and his seamed face was flaming with wrath.

"Buckner," he cried—"ye desarter!"

"What's the matter, Pap?" asked the son, mystified, plunged in an instant from glorious heights to sodden depths.

"Don't worry him, Buck," frowned Doc Hankins.

"Git outen this here house!" panted Old Ike. "And don't ye never, never, as long as the breath o' life's in ye, darken my door ag'in—ye—ye—low-down—*desarter!*" It came—oh, bitterly.

He fell back on the pillows, weakened by the outburst. Doc Hankins rose.

"You mustn't worry him, Buck," Hankins warned. "It might kill him. Better go, I guess."

The deserter looked questioningly toward his mother and his sister, who stood before the closed stone fireplace; they bent their heads sorrowfully, and offered no explanation. Without even thinking to take along his new rifle, Buck Henry went out and hurried to the home of his Uncle Jeptha. He found his kinsman sitting cross-legged in the front doorway.

"What's come over Pap?" he wanted to know, halting at the step.

"Git offen my place, ye low-down desarter!" snapped Jeptha Henry, pointing gateward with the reed stem of his clay pipe.

"And what's come over *ye?*" sharply.

"Ye low-down desarter, git offen my place!" thundered the older man, rising angrily.

Buck Henry could not begin to understand the sudden change in his people's attitude toward him. They had known all the time that he had deserted the army to come home to fight with his own flesh and blood—why had they turned against him *now?* It was exasperating—it was almost maddening! With his head bent dejectedly, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his clay-colored corduroy coat and started, an outcast, for the house of Atchley Budder, the preacher, meaning to wait there for the coming of ten o'clock of the next day.

Atchley Budder not only extended a gracious hospitality: he sent a messenger to Johnsville, the nearest town, for a marriage license.

The outcast rose the following morning feeling more perplexed than ever over the inexplicable behaviour of his relatives. Long and sleepless hours had brought him no hint of the truth. He ate breakfast silently, and when he had finished the meal he went to the vine-hung front porch and dropped moodily into a homemade rocker.

Presently Atchley Budder appeared in the doorway. The old minister was no ill judge of men and their countenances. He knew that all was not well with his guest.

"Son," he smiled, "onburthen yerself to me. I maybe can he'p matters wi' ye. Anyhow, I won't tell—be jiggered ef I do!"

Buck Henry told the kindly old man all there was to tell. Budder was unable to offer any explanation.

"Atter I marry ye and Alice Otterbine," he said, "I'll ride out to yore pap's and see what I can find out, son."

The messenger, a tilt-nosed and freckled youth in brown jeans and blue denim, returned with the marriage license only a few minutes before the time Alice had set for the wedding. He had ridden hard, and he was well-nigh breathless with excitement; he rushed to the porch and caught the prospective groom by an arm.

"Hardman Gourley," he said, "is a-comin' with the sheriff to arrest ye for a-desartin' the United States Army. Like a durned fool, I told 'em ye was here! Better cut the mustard back to the Big Laurel!"

Henry turned to the preacher. "It's all up wi' me, I reckon," he muttered. "I'd better not marry Alice. But I want to see her and tell her goodbye—and I want to ax her pardon for foolin' her like I done. And then I've jest got to go back home and tell mother goodbye. And then—and then—I reckon I'll have to lose myself, preacher."

Budder shook his head sorrowfully. "I hate it for ye, son. I shore do. Yes, tell yore mother goodbye—whatever ye do, do

that. She's one 'at never will go back on ye, don't matter what happens. We don't never have but one, son."

At that instant Alice came. Her clear, topaz eyes were full of the light of an almost idolatrous love.

"I'm here," she smiled, blushing. "I've come, honey."

Buck Henry stepped to her, bent and kissed her hungrily and reverently on the forehead. She read tragedy in his face, and she turned her gaze toward her bare feet. Atchley Budder looked away dimly. Henry spoke, and his voice told of the grief that racked his heart.

"We'd better not, Alice," he said. "It's for yore sake. I'm outlawed, Alice. The officers is a-coming after me now. The preacher'll explain—everything. I beg pardon for foolin' ye like I done. I'll never love nobody but ye. Goodbye! I've got to hurry home and say goodbye to mother now—"

He choked painfully, kissed Alice on the forehead again, turned and went blindly out at the gateless gateway and toward the Big Laurel and his old cabin home on lower Bad Axe.

After two hours of rapid walking, Buck Henry strode into the log house and knelt at his wounded sire's bedside. He had to tell his father goodbye too; the chances were strong against his ever seeing his father again. Old Ike turned his gray head and recognized his eldest son, but he made no outburst; there was no sign of the great wrath that had so shaken him the day before. The better half of Old Ike had won a victory over the other half of him; he was ready and eager to forgive everything now.

"It's all right, Buckner," he said brokenly. "Though I'll git well o' my hurt, I'm too nigh the door o' death to think about sech 'arthly foolishness, Buckner. Yore the chief o' the Henrys, my son; whatever ye see fitten to do is all right."

Jeptha Henry rose from a chair beside the closed stone fireplace and begged his nephew's pardon for his harsh judgment of him.

"Forgit it quick," replied young Henry. Then he faced back to his father and told hastily of the coming of the sheriff, and he had barely finished speaking when old Patterson Murrell, his white head bare, walked unsteadily into the log-walled room! The Henrys stared unbelievingly.

"I'm all broke up, Ike," Patterson Murrell said to his enemy of many years. "I'm willin' and ready to talk about a truce atween the Murrells and the Henrys."

"Talk to my son Buckner thar," muttered Old Ike. "He's leader now. Whatever he says is law to the Henrys jest the same as whatever ye say is law to yore people."

The Henry leader went to his feet and found himself looking into his mother's drawn white face. Her eyes pleaded eloquently for peace. He knew then, as he had never known before, that the shadow of the sword was a cross—and that it always fell heaviest and hardest on the shoulders of women. His mother could not have made him understand more clearly if she had talked to him for a whole day.

"Might I have my choice about the time this here truce shall last, Patterson?" he asked, in a voice that sounded unusual to him because it was hardly the voice of a fighting man.

"A course, you can," agreed Murrell, nodding his white head.

"Then we'll make it a truce of a thousand years, Patterson, and let's shake hands over it," said Buck Henry.

They shook hands heartily, these leaders of men who had never been known to break a truce.

"Now there's two things I've got to know afore I hide out from the shuriff," said Buck Henry. "What're ye all broke up about, Patterson? And what did ye git mad at me about, Pap?"

"Acause ye desarted us and made love to Patterson Murrell's gyurl," answered Old Ike. "Yore Cousin Tib Henry followed ye and seed ye."

"I'm all broke up acause I've done lost that same gyurl, the only child I ever had, to ye, Buck," answered Patterson Murrell.

Buck Henry's eyes widened in amazement. Alice Murrell and Preacher Atchley Budder had just arrived on horseback, and with them rode Sheriff Alvin Harmes. The three entered the room hurriedly.

"Ye fooled me, Alice!" cried Buck Henry. "Ye told me yore name was Otterbine!"

Alice Murrell smiled nervously. "Ye told me yore name was John Doe, Buck," she said. "I—I reckon I done jest about the same thing ye done. I—I—I-I-liked ye the minute I laid eyes on ye, Buck! I was afeard ye was a Henry—and I was afeard ef ye knowed I was a Murrell—I was afeard—"

In spite of the presence of the grim law's representative, Buck Henry laughed.

"Hain't it a dog-goned shame," he said, "that I've got to be arrested and sent to a military prison instid o' bein' married to the very sweetest gyurl God 'lmighty ever made! And jest when we'd agreed on a truce a thousand years long. Talk about bad luck; jest what would ye call this here, Alice? Atter this, honey, I carries me a hoss shoe in each one o' all my pockets!"

He held out his wrists for the manacles. Sheriff Harmes, who was a man as well as an officer, smiled and shook his head.

"Irons are not necessary, are they, Buck? If you're ready—"

Buck Henry, the deserter, shook hands with his father and with his uncle and with old Patterson Murrell, and kissed his mother and his sister and his sweetheart; then he went toward the Johnville jail with the sheriff. And as he went there rang in his ears the parting words of his Alice:

"I'll wait for ye, honey. Ef ye don't never come back, I'll wait for ye jest the same."

Shortly after they had reached Johnsville, Harmes sent a telegram to certain military authorities. The answering message came the next day. When he had read it, Harmes passed it on to his prisoner. Ten minutes later, Buck Henry was hurrying toward the great, dim-blue hills, alone and unguarded.

Alice met him at his father's door. "Did ye git away, Buck?" she cried. "Did ye git away from Harmes?"

Buck thrust a yellow sheet of paper toward her. "Read that!"

"Honey boy," she smiled, "I cain't read nary a word. Ye read it to me."

The happy, happy young man read the message to her. It ran like this:

Buck Henry's enlistment was out on the day of his desertion. Release him.

CAPERTON, *Adjt.*

"And I'd done forgot all about it!" said Buck Henry.

Ordinarily, the hill man takes little heed of the passing time.

In the January number: NINE POINTS OF THE LAW, *by Elwood Brown.* Three men, purchaser, agent, and repair man, claim the ownership of a certain Red Rover roadster. Each, without the formality of a writ of replevin, seizes the car by virtue of lien, purchasers, or lease rights. Yet they individually and severally forget about that little "Right of Discovery" law which Columbus introduced into the New York Code.

A DATE WITH FATE

BY GERTRUDE SANBORN

Because her husband is apparently no longer blessed with the impulse amorous, a woman finds that, in the warmth of her own living room, she can no longer feel "chilly and sentimental." She goes into the park to attempt the re-discovery of Romance.

"GOOD heavens, Mary, what makes you so restless?" Mr. Willis crackled his newspaper and stared at his wife. "Every time that I get to the third word in this headline and inform myself that 'Russia is Nearing—' you make a sudden move and I'm back in the U. S."

"Tom Willis," returned his wife, "you are tiresome and exasperating. You don't do a thing to make my evenings interesting. You are as superfluous as a traffic cop in Venice. There you sit with a newspaper around your head and a bath robe around your feet, while a lovely moon is shining out doors!" She drew nearer and glared at her husband.

"I've crocheted enough lace, evenings, in the last six months, to stretch twice around the walls of China. I simply abhor sitting here every night simply because you have a neuralgic pain in your shoulder-blade."

"Go out, my dear," suggested Mr. Willis, his eyes still searching his paper. "Take a turn about the park in the motor. The new chauffeur came yesterday and he complained today about having nothing to do."

Mrs. Willis, with drooping, dejected shoulders, traveled the length of the library and stood viewing herself in a pier glass at the far end of the brilliantly lighted room.

There was no doubt her corsetiere was an artist. How well sage green looked contrasted with a clear skin! Really, seven years of married life sometimes improves a woman. But a man! Her eyes returned to Tom. He was unmistakably round and smug. He was prosaic.

Silence settled itself warily. Mrs. Willis retreated into a recess and, from behind a brocaded curtain, peered out onto the moonlit avenue.

Somebody was going by. With nose misshapen against the glass, she assured herself that the person, who looked like a baker, did have his arm around the fluffy maiden at his side. The fever of romance went pumping through Mary Willis's veins. She opened a closet door, took down a hat and coat and stepped into the vestibule.

Mr. Willis, startled, rose slowly.

"I'm going out," called his wife's voice, "and I'm going alone and I shall not come in till I've had an adventure. Don't send the cook after me with more wraps. I want to sit in the moonlight and feel chilly and sentimental."

Bang! The door shut her out where there were lovers and fragrant syringa bushes; and shut him in with the stock reports and the war and long columns of "Roomers Wanted."

She straightened her hat, put on a pair of white silk gloves and fastened the neck of her coat. Then she hurried along to the park. Up and down she walked enjoying the crunch of the gravel. She looked at the moon; she smelled the flowers. She was free; she could think her own thoughts; could sit down or get up. She tried a bench. People passed her;—lovers. She was consumed by a torrent of recklessness that no thought of home and a forty-eight waist-banded husband could stem.

Leaning over a stone facade she looked down into a jungle of ferns and imported roses,—a likely place for snakes. Something struck against her ankles and she screamed. A shadow fell on the white

stone; someone was behind her.

"Don't be alarmed," said a pleasant, youthful sounding voice; "that was only a comic supplement blowing about."

Here was the adventure! Joy gripped her heart. But before proceeding farther she must make certain inquiries.

"Are you bald and fat, or—" she hesitated, "or the reverse?" she finished.

"My appearance is lank, my soul is lean, and my respectability so well established as to be cold and clammy."

"Very good," said the little lady; "come around where I can see you."

"Thank you," said the voice.

A well set-up person appeared, attired in a neat gray suit. He smiled. His teeth reminded her of the teeth of an Arabian she had seen at the Exposition, and she wondered if he used salt on them. The Arabian had said salt was positively the best dentifrice. Mr. Willis had stubby, yellow teeth.

"I want you to understand," Mrs. Willis informed the strange man briskly, "that I've come out here because I am sick and tired of crocheting picots across guest towels and because I love romance." Her profile was alluring in the silvery light.

"Romance or dyspepsia, I am at your command. Only sorry I didn't arrive before you were frightened. Saw you cross the bridge and tried to catch up with you there."

He, too, leaned over the facade and peered down cautiously at nothing in particular. He had nice slick hair and his coat collar sat well.

Under the young man's spontaneity, Mrs. Willis found the enervating effects of her peevish mood clearing away like smoke before a rollicking breeze. A path, where pleasurable emotions would snub convention, was stretching away before her. Gingerly she thrust her foot out and took the first step.

"Suppose we try our luck on the water." She pointed, with gay abandon, down a twisty flight of steps partly hidden by shrubbery. "There are boats down there."

"Certainly," he acquiesced. "I used to pull a pretty fair oar."

Down they tripped, a guiding hand assisting Mrs. Willis over the uneven places. Down ten steps she thought: Oh! Bosh on Tom Willis sitting at home with a moist, smelly hot-water bag on his old shoulder! Tom thought, just as all husbands did, that loading motors and servants and houses on a woman took the place of sweet words and lover-like glances. Servants and houses weren't worth a bean on a night like this.

Seated in the stern of a boat, she compared her husband with her cavalier. Tom couldn't row a boat; he ate too much caviare. He couldn't lift anybody off a pier in arms of steel or smile like a god.

"Where would you like to go?" inquired Adonis in a tone that was warm and deliciously personal. She commented, inwardly, on his mastery of the minor points that go to perfect the art of charming.

It was delightful to think their steps had crossed. It was Fate. She had read about Fate in books and newspapers, but to go right out and find it so expeditiously was almost disconcerting. And what a pleasant thing it was, this Fate,—so obliging.

"Go anywhere you like," she returned dreamily.

"Rather where you like," he corrected. "Just pick out the route and I'll turn on the power."

Settling herself comfortably, she viewed the rolling shores of the little lake. Here and there a light glimmered. Opposite, among the rocks, a fire blazed up. People were hopping about it with long sticks, shouting triumphantly over each hot, pasty marshmallow. The pavilion was gay, but she was glad they had not gone there. It was hard to talk in a mob; besides, some of her friends might be there and friends are apt to be stupid in matters of romance.

Just once a sharp tremor assailed her heart, but the debonair young person resting on his oars, brought her back to the realm of delightful mystery.

"I'm here for just one thing and that is to help you enjoy the scenery," he said, sending a glory of protectiveness straight at her from his wide eyes. "And there is no limit to the stunts I can undertake for your amusement."

"It is highly amusing just to be free," she answered; "suppose we drift."

"Right-o, but I don't agree with your qualification of freedom. I've been free for years. Free from every tie and I hate it. Nobody to go away from, nobody to come back to. Last summer I spent in Italy and the darned old moon nearly splintered my spine with high voltage shivers. It is a little more considerate tonight," he added gently. "I had a good case of back home colic before I found you. Ever have topographical tantrums?"

She laughed a negation. They drifted on and on.

"You mustn't be disappointed," he resumed presently, "if I don't quite come up to your expectations as a conversationalist. Talking to ladies is rather out of my line these days. I'll promise to do better next time."

She started. He had said "next time." Then this wonderful adventure would continue! She experienced the dawning consciousness of an eerie mating that by some deep, inner process her being was undergoing.

Her common sense, startled, sent a hurry call to all the wraiths of other days. Pale memories of country villas came, vivid recollections of bank accounts, confusing thoughts of an indulgent husband pouring heaps of gold along her path with chubby hands. They jostled and pushed. Finally, common sense, with troubled haste, whipped them together into a conglomerate mass and slapped them against the lady's brain, but the inflammation had attacked her heart so the poultice failed.

She told herself she loved this boy. Of course it was all very sudden. Big things usually are. He would take her away somewhere and they would drift under countless moons; would listen to waves washing far-off shores and breathe the perfume of sweet, tropical flowers. They would see the faces of many strange peoples and her adoration would keep him content the whole world over. He would buy her wonderful garments of finest texture and bring them with adoring arms and wrap her close.

An exclamation startled her. "I believe we are running into a storm." The young man creaked the oars and made a hurried dash for shore. He lifted her from the boat like a wisp of straw and commanded, "Run for the hill; there is a tunnel under it."

He followed, and, while the storm roared and cracked and thundered, tried to pacify her. She pressed close to his side. A ripping flash, a frightened cry, and then an arm was thrown around her to hold her safe and steady. She looked up and smiled, and thought how wonderful he was. He looked down and smiled and thought, "Cæsar! She's a whole lot like mother. Same soft, blowy hair and saucy smile; about the same age, too. Dear old Mummy, how thunder storms did frighten her!" The thought gave impetus to his grip and his arm tightened suddenly.

It was not very late when Mrs. Willis opened the front door and stepped into the vestibule, but the big house was dark, save for a light on the wide stair.

She stood still and shivered. The rain had matted her hair and a greenish stream ran from her hat and dripped onto the floor. She pressed her soggy gloves together and smiled as she thought of the boy's last words: "I'll bring the car around for you at nine in the morning." The pounding of her heart shook her.

Her husband was asleep. She burst in and woke him rudely.

"Yes, yes, my dear! What's matter? House afire? Jewels gone? Got dyspepsia?"

"See here, Tom Willis, I've found *the* man. I can't part with him. I won't!" She clutched her dripping garments and glared at her sleepy spouse.

"Oh, all right, Mary. Thought you might resent my sending the chauffeur after you tonight when you had said so decidedly that you wanted to be alone. No need to give him up that I see. Glad you like him. He's a bit high-priced, but think of the class in a gear that's shifted by a college youth. Awfully down on his luck, poor chap. We'll do what we can for him won't we, Kitten?"

Gleason—her new chauffeur!

Her gaze traveled down the rose bro-

cade, hanging in graceful folds, at the windows, and lingered a long time on her dressing table. Tom had given her those crystal bottles. He had brought home that exquisite cameo surrounded by pearls. Tom always did everything for her, even to sending out high-priced servants to attend to her safety at night.

"What?" queried Mr. Willis, in an unbelieving tone. "Yes, thank you, my dear, I would like the hot water bottle. You say rubbing might help my shoulder? There, it does feel better. You are awfully good to your dull old husband, but you know I'd send out and get the earth done up in tin foil for you, if you said so. I told Gleason," he added, yawning comfortably, "to call for you at nine in the morning. What say, Mary? You'll get up at seven and drive down with me? Mr. Willis reached out and hugged Mrs. Willis. "It will be like old times, Kitten. Have you shopping to do so early?"

"I want to get come crochet cotton," murmured Mrs. Willis meekly. "I'm going to put some picots on half a dozen towels for your sister. It will be nice work to do in the evening while you read."

For thirty years, on the first day of each month, a Southern colonel takes an oath to avenge the death of his mother, caused by a merciless Union officer. One day the opportunity comes. Read about it in AFTER THIRTY YEARS, *by Robert McBlair.* It is another January story.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

BY EDGAR WELTON COOLEY

A burglar goes to the trouble of blowing a "burglar-proof" safe and is then satisfied to go on his way with a woman's picture instead of the bank funds.

AS he stepped out of the alley into the street, it began to rain dismally. This pleased him, for it added to the blackness of the night and had a tendency to drive away any late pedestrian.

He was not hampered by luggage. Such tools as he needed—a bar of soap, an air-pump, a can of nitroglycerine, some fuse, a jimmy, a dark lantern, a revolver—he carried in his pockets, and, under his coat, a folded grain sack.

Without pausing, without hesitating, he glanced searchingly up and down the street. A smoking oil lamp stood upon a post on the corner of the main street of the village, its feeble rays struggling ineffectively in the mist. No living creature was stirring; no other glimmer visible.

A few strides took him to the side window of a building. The sill was on a level with his head. He tried to raise the sash, but, as he had expected, it was fastened. So he took the jimmy from his pocket, and, slipping its thin edge under the frame, threw all his weight suddenly upon the handle.

With a report like that of a pistol, the lock snapped. For five minutes, perhaps, the burglar crouched in the shadows under the window, watching, listening. But not a sound, save the patter of the rain in the gutter, did he hear; not a moving object did he see.

Then carefully, noiselessly, he pushed up the sash and climbed in. He was in total darkness, but knew exactly where he stood. He could have drawn an accurate, detailed plan of the interior of the building—knew precisely how many feet it was from the window to the safe; from the safe to the front doors; from the window to his horse and buggy, standing in the alley at the rear.

So, although he could not see his hand before him, he turned confidently to his left and walked six paces. Then he circled to his right around the end of the counter, and took four steps more. Pausing, he reached out his hand and touched the safe.

The burglar moved his hand gleefully over the door and laughed. The bank was not provided with a vault. A good vault costs as much as a building, and this was a small bank in a country town. So the funds were entrusted to the protection of this "burglar-proof" safe. He wondered what the citizens would say about "burglar-proof" safes while gathering up the pieces!

Without losing a moment, he filled the cracks around the door of the safe with soap, leaving one small opening. To this opening he attached his pump and exhausted the air on the inside.

Closing the opening, he cut a piece off the bar of soap, and, rolling it between his palms and moulding it with his fingers, soon fashioned it into the shape of a small cup. This he fastened at the bottom of the door and filled with nitroglycerine. Then he attached a fuse.

Ten feet from the safe, a door opened into the rear office of the bank, and in this room the safe-breaker had planned to seek refuge while the explosive was doing its work. Not desiring to tarry unnecessarily in close proximity to a charge of nitroglycerine about to explode, he concluded, before lighting the fuse, to satisfy himself that the door of this inner room was not locked or bolted.

He turned the knob, the door opened readily, and he took one step across the threshold. Then he paused. In the in-

tense darkness he could not see an object; in the perfect silence he could not hear a sound.

But Something—premonition, instinct, some indefinable sixth sense—Something sent a chill through him, and he trembled as one who suddenly becomes conscious of the presence of unseen spirits. Without the power to move, he stood, staring into the darkness, the perspiration standing in icy drops upon his forehead.

With the desperation that fear inspires, he drew his dark-lantern, slipped back the slide, and threw the searching glare around the room, lighting first the most distant corner. Slowly he moved the lantern, bringing the round spot of brilliant light toward him across the carpet. Suddenly he uttered a low cry and shrank back as the light fell fiercely upon an object almost at his feet.

So near that by stooping the burglar could have touched him, a dead man lay, his waxen face and sightless eyes turned upwards! The carpet where his head and shoulders rested, gleamed scarlet with his blood; the nerveless fingers of his right hand clasped a pistol; in the centre of his forehead was a ghastly wound.

With a strange weakness in his knees the burglar bent over the dead man, brushed back his matted hair, took the pistol gently from his fingers and folded his hands across his breast. In the corpse the cracksman recognized Frazer, the bank cashier.

On the desk beside him was the following letter, unsealed:

> "Being no longer able to conceal my shortage, to hide the fact that the safe does not contain the amount of money that it should, and being a coward, I have chosen a coward's method of paying my debt. I do not ask for pity. I only ask compassion for my wife."

For a moment the burglar stood undecided, the letter in his hand. Suddenly, breaking the impressive silence, came the loud ringing of a telephone bell. Instantly, involuntarily, the burglar closed the lantern slide, gripped his pistol and crouched behind the desk. Again the bell rang, and mechanically he arose and walked to the telephone. Standing with one foot on each side of the dead cashier, he took down the receiver.

"Hello," he said, imitating the voice of one whose eyes he could feel, but could not see. He was answered by a woman.

"Oh, Henry!" she said, "I have just awakened from such a vivid, such an awful dream. I know it is silly, but it frightened me. I dreamed that you were in trouble, in disgrace. And then I awoke and found you had not returned home. Oh, Henry, what is keeping you so late? Come home at once, will you not, dear?"

"Yes," the burglar replied, as one in a daze.

"Do," she continued, and there was anxiety in her voice. "I am so glad, so glad it was only a dream. I would rather see you dead than dishonored, Henry dear."

The cracksman crept back to the desk and seated himself in the dead man's chair, the woman's voice still ringing in his ears.

That voice! It haunted him like a memory of the long ago, like an echo of the days of childhood. It stirred, it thrilled him. It aroused that old mad love of his boyhood. Whose voice was it? Undoubtedly the wife of that dead coward lying at his feet. But who had she been before—before she married him?

That voice! Could it be Martha's? Years and years ago, when they were schoolmates, he had loved Martha, worshipping her from afar, for she was a dweller on the Avenue, and he a child of the tenements. A vast social gulf divided them, but he loved her in secret, knowing that he scarcely entered her thoughts.

Once he had thrashed a boy for teasing her, and she had smiled at him. He had never forgotten that smile. That was years and years ago, but, though she had long since passed out of his life, he had never loved another. And now—was that voice indeed the voice of Martha?

Again the burglar deliberately opened the slide of his lantern and turned the gleam upon the desk. Directly in front of him he saw a picture in a silver frame. It was a photograph of a woman—not a

particularly handsome woman—but glorified by a dazzling smile—and he recognized that smile!

From that face he turned reluctantly at last to gaze with scorn at the cold features of the man lying there with the scarlet mark of sin upon his brow. He felt no pity now—nothing but contempt—but Martha's words, "I would rather see you dead than dishonored," rang in his ears.

With a smile he placed the letter—the contemptible letter—in his pocket, picked up Frazer's pistol, replaced the empty shell with a loaded cartridge, and laid the weapon in a drawer. Then he tore the collar of the cashier's coat, ripped one sleeve half its length, and overturned the chairs and scattered them about.

It was nearly daybreak. In a few moments the gray would be creeping up the eastern sky.

Quickly the burglar blew the safe and scattered the gold and silver and banknotes upon the floor. "Now," he said, to himself, "they will find the bank broken, the safe looted, the cashier murdered!" Leaving his soap and dark lantern by the shattered safe, he fled, and two things only did he take—the cashier's letter and the photograph in the silver frame.

Through the rain and darkness he drove away, penniless but not unhappy. A woman's smiling face seemed to thank him. He laughed aloud as he fled through the gray of morning, thinking of a schoolgirl smiling at a ragged urchin.

THE BURNING RIVET, *by Willard Bradley* is a strong story. It is about a woman whose life is devoid of high lights. For the first time in years her soul is awakened by the coming of spring with its potent appeal. Watching a drug soaked husband, who sleeps through the din of hydraulic drills and the pounding of rivets, palls upon her. What she does about it and what Fate does about it make an interesting story. You will find it in the January BLACK CAT.

"THEM'S HIS TOOLS"

BY LORA WOOD HUGHES

With the aid of some er—tools, a little bowlegged man qualifies for the job of gang boss in a camp where the habit of hitting hard and often is an excellent one to cultivate.

IT isn't a man I want. A man is no good for the Jolly Boy Drive. What I want is a good brute—a fellow with a muscle that will strike terror to 'em every time they look at him."

It was Herrick, overseer of the H. & R. Logging Company telling his troubles to the clerk in the Success Employment Office.

The clerk jerked his thumb toward the door, where two men were blocking the entrance—two men you would look at a long time without a comment.

"Speaking of muscle"—Herrick turned around. The room was full of men of brawn and more or less brain, men who were waiting to dig and lift and pull their way into three meals a day, a bunk and a little to drink and gamble on at the end of the month.

"It's 'Squatty' Smith and Dave Currey—chums at large," grinned the clerk, adjusting his pipe. "Maybe Squatty's the fellow you're looking for."

A little apart from the others stood the two strange, unmatched men.

"By gosh, what a pair!" observed Herrick. He was at once absorbed in what he saw.

Dave was a long, lean, Jack-in-the-box sort, with an upward trend to his whole person. His hair stood straight upon his high forehead and his eyebrows seemed trying to catch up with his pompadore. His nose turned up with such vim that it pulled the upper lip along with it, lifting the corners of his mouth in a line of perpetual mirth. His shoulders were narrow and his long arms terminated in hands as slim and delicate as a woman's. The rest of him was—legs, rubbery-like legs, hung so close that they flopped together at the knees when he walked.

Somehow, looking at Dave, Herrick thought of an umbrella turned wrong side out.

As for "Squatty"—he was a human weeping willow; short, bowlegged and drooping. His heavy hair hung down from a massive square head. His full beard framed a pair of eyes, unlit at the particular moment, like the eyes of an infant. He lumbered from side to side when he walked, like a trained gorilla. What Herrick noticed with the most conviction were the arms of Squatty, great Sandow sheaths of muscles stood out on them, like nothing Herrick had ever seen.

"I guess he has the ear-marks of a brute—that short one," Herrick finally remarked to the clerk. "Call him over, will you."

The clerk didn't call them over. He went over to the men. He knew them.

"How, boys," he said familiarly.

Sparks kindled in Squatty's eyes.

"Has she come?" he whispered through his beard.

"Yep," answered the clerk, between his teeth. "It's Herrick of the H. & R. looking for a boss, a brute to manage the Jolly Boy Gang. Play up, boys," and he led the way to where Herrick was waiting the brief introduction, smoking the while.

Squatty folded his arms and waited.

Dave drummed on the counter with slim, nervous fingers.

"What's your line?" Herrick squinted at Squatty through smoke-bitten eyes.

"Gang boss." The sparks in Squatty's eyes kindled again.

"Where d'yu hail from?"

"Five Mile."

"Couldn't you manage 'em up there?"

Dave laughed. Squatty picked one boot toe with the other.

"Oh, I tamed 'em up there," he said, in an off-hand way.

"There ain't no monarchy on the hull river no more. They believe in a republic form o' government on the Five Mile."

Herrick was nonplused. A bit of admiration slipped in. Here was a brute who baffled.

"I'll give you a chance at the Jolly Boy Gang; last boss lying up with a fractured collar-bone. He'll put you onto the ropes, though. Where can I pick you up, say about two?"

"Well,—" Squatty hesitated. "There's one thing as ain't been settled yet. It's him," pointing to Dave. "Me and him never goes apart."

"Oh, that so?" Herrick looked at Dave.

"All right," he said. "Reckon you can find something to keep him amused," and Squatty, thinking of the part Dave always played in his life among the lumberjacks, said amusedly: "I reckon I kin," and the bargain was cinched.

Promptly at two, Herrick's light wagon drew up at the rooming-house which bore the number Dave had given him.

Instantly Dave appeared with two well filled duffle sacks; following came Squatty and a couple of men lugging a huge box.

"What in thunder!" began Herrick.

"Them's his tools," explained the smiling Dave. "He don't go nowhere to boss a gang without them fools."

"Tools, man!" Herrick began to think a couple of clowns were imposing on him. What sort of tools could a lumber-jack carry in a box of that size? Well, no use. A bargain was a bargain. Herrick looked straight ahead. The box was heaved in. Squatty climbed on the seat by Herrick, Dave sat astride a brown duffle sack.

"All set," said Squatty. Herrick pulled the brake, the team leaped forward eager for the road.

Out of the town, on the little opening where the forest had stepped back a tiny bit to let the road go through, Herrick ventured to talk of the difficulties of the Jolly Boy Camp.

"Ugly gang to manage out there, Smith."

"Sure," vouchsafed Squatty hopefully.

"Takes more swearing to drive that bunch than you ever heard at a circus."

Nothing from Squatty.

The wagon rattled on awhile. Herrick couldn't stand that stone image by his side. Why in Heaven's name didn't he talk—of the fights he must have had and the men he had tamed, or, remembering those arms, broken? Most river bosses were free enough to exploit their own strength if for nothing else than to gain confidence in themselves.

Not so Squatty. Silent he sat with his arms folded, his short body waving about as the wagon swayed this side and that.

At sundown the clearing widened. From the top of a hill the river came into view—a smooth ribbon, blue as the sky above it, reflecting along its farther bank, tall black pines tipped with the sunset's rosiness.

"Oh, Davie, me boy!" cried Squatty. "What a foine sight!"

Dave arose and stood hanging onto the back of the wagon seat. Thus they descended the hill into the Jolly Boy Camp.

The day's work was finished. There were half a dozen log buildings about which the unkept, rough-clothed rivermen, twenty strong, lounged and smoked.

From one of the cabins a grimy Frenchman appeared and bent all his energies beating a piece of iron scraper hanging from the arm of a tree. Pipes were emptied. Every man turned toward the mess house. Behind the rest came Herrick, Dave, and the new boss. The place hummed like a hive; but when the men saw Herrick, the noise of conversation died away. Each man looked at his plate and the sipping of hot coffee mingled with the rattle of knives and forks.

Herrick noticed that Squatty did not look so powerful by the side of Jake Le Bole and a few of the giants. Trouble began brewing in Herrick's brain, and not caring to get mixed up in what he termed the inevitable, he decided to go on up the river until both the men and Squatty should find out "Who's who." Herrick swallowed his supper without a thought of Mr. Fletcher.

Rising, he said in a matter-of-fact way: "Boys, this man here, Smith his name is—"

"I'm Squatty, fellers," the new boss said, so clearly that every man heard; but he didn't raise his eyes from his well filled plate.

"Well then, 'Squatty,'" continued Herrick. "He's the new boss. I'm going to the upper camp for a few days. Hope things'll boom along. We're behind on No. 2 drive."

In twos and threes the men filed out. Herrick had some final words with Squatty, ordered the kid to bring around his horse, and rode away.

A dim light shone from the bunk-house windows. A hum of voices greeted Dave and Squatty as they approached. Some one was playing a mouth organ. The interior of the bunk house was anything but cheerful. Rude shelves, three tiers high, ran around the place from floor to roof. Each man claimed six feet of shelf as his bunk. Old quilts and blankets, smelling of tobacco and devitalized air, were piled in disgusting confusion. There were no benches. Nail kegs and apple boxes were at a premium. For the most part, each man claimed a block of wood or his duffle sack as his resting place. A half dozen Fins were playing cards from a slab of wood elevated upon two lard buckets.

From time to time, a lighted match was used to settle a dispute, so poor was the light that emanated from the one smokey lamp which occupied a shingle across the end of the grind-stone frame. There were kegs of salt fish and pickles, a barrel of decaying turnips, and a pile of onions, moulding on the floor.

On a block of wood, his huge hands dangling between wide apart knees, his body bent well forward, sat Jake Le Bole, the giant bully of the gang, crooning the words of an obscene song.

Squatty stopped close by his side. He touched Jake's powerful shoulder with his broad palm. Jake bristled like an enraged bear, but continued his vile song the more loudly.

"I don't blame ye, partner," said Squatty, "if ye feel like singin' them words in sech a hole as this yere bunk house. Come on, give me a lift with the big box, will ye?"

"Who was your servant this time last year?" Jake growled.

"There's somethin' fer *ye*, Jake, in the big box; somethin' I brung all the way from the city!"

Jake was about won over; but the men, knowing how Jake itched for a fight, closed around the pair. Jake caught the spirit of the amusement-hungry gang. He was no sissy to be hauled around by the nose. He told Squatty so in plain, profane language, and he warmed himself as he talked into a frenzy of vile names which he flung at Squatty broadside.

It had come sooner than the new boss thought—the opportunity to use again what Squatty called his "sixth sense."

"Men," Squatty was speaking. His words reached every ear. The card game was discontinued. It was still as a church in the bunk house. "Men," Squatty reiterated, "there's just one place around here where we're goin' to use strength of muscle." He flung out his right arm, contracted the huge biceps and let it fall, relaxed against his thigh. "That one place is down on the river, battlin' with them logs. Around here, it's brains that counts—brains and a bit of a smile. I'm tired of fightin'. That's why I quit the game."

At the word "game," Jake picked up his ears. Squatty resumed: "There ain't much glory in being a bully, 'cause it don't last no time. Here's Jake. He's been the river king a year or so. Some day a feller comes along with a bigger hammer nor Jake's and Jake's not in it any more—see! Fightin' don't get ye nowheres!"

"You're a coward," roared Jake. "You're afraid to fight!"

"Well, maybe I *am*," answered Squatty. "But, anyway, Jake, ye ain't got nothin' on me, fer I know what ye think of me, but ye'll never know what I'm thinkin' of ye this minute. Come on, fellers. Now for the big show!"

Dave was hauling a duffle sack, two others the huge box, into the center of the room. Squatty took from the sack a large parcel done in heavy paper. It proved to be a mammoth Rochester lamp, with double reflectors.

"Who'll skuttle fer oil?"

The response was immediate. The lamp was fastened to the center post, and the reflectors adjusted. It transformed the whole place. A fine excitement began to possess the men as Dave removed the cover of the big box. The sides fell away, revealing a melodeon packed about with song books.

Without a word, Dave gathered his arm full and began passing each man a book.

Squatty stood by the melodeon. When Dave had finished with the books, he sat on an apple box and ran his fingers over the keys of the instrument.

Squatty made a low bow. When he raised himself, a wave of "Oh's" and "Ah's" ran around the room.

Something had happened. Squatty had lost his beard. The face he presented to the men was like none they had ever seen, and seemed an altogether misfit with the rest of him.

It was a face of such calm sweetness and sympathy, such delicate refinement, mingled with strength, that one would love to remember it always.

The men were awed, and when Squatty began singing in a full, clear voice, "Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot," aye, I can scarcely tell, how Jake and Pete and Dan and Ed lost their sullen, overbearing swagger in response to that call from the the old days. For some it was the call of a little kid and its mother—the little kid he had left behind when he came to make a home in the new country. Others heard once again lullabyes, long wrapped in the mist of years and drink and toil,—lullabyes in native tongues almost forgotten. Some heard a call they had never heard before—the indistinct, confused, soundless voice of his Divine Comrade, his better self.

Squatty had done what he intended, and when the men were in this putty-like state he pictured the camp of the future.

There was to be light and warmth and cleanliness. A tomato can bank would be hung by the door in which each man was to drop what he wished to provide a fund for games, boxing gloves and magazines. Dave would shave any man Thursdays and Saturdays after work, which was a hint to "clean up."

They didn't give "there cheers" for the new boss, or make any loud demonstration, but a number of the gang sneaked down to the river and shiveringly made unusual ablutions. It was a good sign.

The next day work began in earnest. Every river man takes pride in his strength, and those muscles of Squatty's were an incentive to do one's best. Evening found the men tired and hungry. The dinner was unsatisfactory.

Emotions had been stirred the previous evening which the strenuous day's work had not hushed. Faces of loved ones, deserted duties, neglected opportunities, bobbed up and down in their minds as the logs bobbed up and down in the water. A reaction came with the bunk-house environment. The men were itching for trouble. But Jake had nothing to say. The others were cautious not to be the promoters of a fight without Jake as a champion.

So the days passed, and at the end of a fortnight, Squatty's Big Idea was nearing fruition. It was then that Herrick came galloping into camp. It was night. A radiant glow shone from the windows of the bunk house. Herrick flung the reins over the neck of the mustang and dropped from the saddle; then he stood stock-still. Out upon the air floated the mellow, soul-warming strains of a melodeon, a few chords struck with an artist's touch, and now twenty full, spirited voices, in different parts, took up the old familiar song: "Do they miss me at Home, Do they miss me?"

"My God," said Herrick, softly, to the towering pines.

"My God!" It was not an oath. It was the nearest thing to a prayer Herrick had attempted in years. He reverently removed his hat and leaned his head on his arm against the neck of his horse.

When the song was finished, then another and another, Herrick ventured to look in at the window. He went stealthily like a trespasser. He saw first the smiling, beardless face of Squatty, leading the singing. The interior of the bunk house was transformed. A long rough table extended the entire half length of the room. About it, on comfortable benches, sat a gang of

clean-shaven fellows, each with a music book, singing as though his heart was in the song. The bunks were neatly spread. Jake was passing apples and singing at the top of his voice.

With long strides, Herrick made for the river. It was clear. "Gee whillikins!" he ejaculated, surveying the sweep of water where so long the jam had been. "They've cleared the river; the millennium sure is come!"

He sought the new boss, and demanded to know the whole mystery in detail.

Squatty explained: "'Tain't nothin' strange. There ain't no mud or bog so vile but that somethin' can be heard singin' up out of it. It's singin' the world needs, Boss, not cussin'. Every one of them fellows has a hundred violin strings runnin' through him. Somehow, me and Dave, we can strike 'em so's they'll sing.

"That's our business—Dave's and mine."

IT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT, *by Rex Stout* is another feature of the January BLACK CAT. A man wishes to meet a lady whom he greatly admires, but a formal introduction is not to his liking. He wishes to make the manner of their meeting so original as to take the lady off her size 3, width A feet. The solving of the problem and the surprise ending make an amusing story.

BLOOD BROTHERS OF THE WILD

BY CHART PITT

If you like stories of the North, you will like this one. It is about a man who was "too proud to fight."

INGING WIND, the Yellow-knife squaw, stood like an outraged queen of the wild, venting her spite upon the huge-limbed man who calmly smoked beside the fire.

"God never intended a woman of the Yellow-knife to mate with a coward," the woman stormed. "Does he send the eagle down to mate with the spruce-hen?"

"You're some eagle all right," the big man admitted. "When you get all het up like that you're an honor to the tribe. What's it all about? Where does the spruce-hen come in?"

"You—you coward," the girl snarled. "To think of a Yellow-knife marrying a man that's afraid!"

A full-throated wail came shivering across the miles of the night.

"Do you hear?" the girl challenged. "That's the wolf-pack—my blood-brothers. They are the gray brothers of the wilderness—and we are the red. I am a Yellow-knife,—just the wolf-pack and the Yellow-knife people,—they are the masters of the northern snows."

"You said a whole mouthful that time," the man admitted. "If there's anything worse than a wolf it's a Yellow-knife woman when she is mad."

"I am proud of it," the girl gloated. "It is the blood-brotherhood of the wild. The wolf-pack and the Yellow-knife people know the same law of the snows,—that the coward must die,—and you are a coward."

"I suppose this is all over me leaving Swamp Creek because McPhearson got his cabin in head of me. You Yellow-knives would have burned him out, but I'm a white man; you'll learn that in time," the man tried to explain.

"So is Jean Jolet a white man," the girl taunted him. "Did he want to go without a fight? No; he is a brave man, not a spruce-hen. He is a man a Yellow-knife woman might love without shame."

"So that's the way the wind is blowing, my Yellow-knife beauty. I thought you'd been edging over his way for the last week." The man shifted his position beside the fire, but made no effort to rise.

"I love him; I am not ashamed," the woman defied. "And he can have me, too, if he'll take me after my disgrace. God! I'll never forget the shame of it—a Yellow-knife woman married to a coward."

The man half rose beside the fire. He looked at her a moment and a flame flickered in his eyes. Slowly he knocked the ashes from his pipe, refilled it and resumed his smoking. Then he settled down to watch the flaming spruce-logs with eyes that never shifted.

The mysterious silence of the wilderness night crept closer about the little camp, as the fire died down and the man smoked on, unheeding.

Then the woman brought more fuel from under the spruces and set the fire crackling again.

"Don't be afraid; I won't let the wolves hurt you." She tried to goad him into speech, but the man only shifted his long legs beside the fire. Several times he lifted his head and listened. The voices of dogs came to him through the night.

It was time for the winter snows, and Jean Jolet had gone over to Willow Creek for the dogs.

The woman watched her giant mate out of the corner of one eye. Perhaps she had overstepped herself that time; perhaps

even Duncan McGregor, who was a spruce-hen and a coward, could be crowded into a fight. She didn't like his silence. She had come to fear the silent men of the North. Those who said the least were the most bitter and heartless when they set their feet to the blood-trail.

Singing Wind's heart fluttered as the yelp of the sledge-dogs sounded just beyond the bend in the trail. She knew it was Jean Jolet, the man whom even a Yellow-knife woman might love without shame.

The man beside the fire had proven himself a coward. There was no question about it; he had violated the honor of the Yellow-knives. But why didn't he talk?

So the woman waited, watching for the battle-flame to flicker in those cold gray eyes.

Her husband was a coward, but even the stolid musk-ox fought for possession of its mate.

The woman waited. As her husband rose to meet his partner, her blood ran rife with the call of battle; perhaps he would fight after all.

Though she would not admit it even to herself, she knew, down deep in her heart, that there was something there that had been born one soft night in the spring, when Duncan McGregor had first come to the camp of the Yellow-knife. If he fought, and fought well, perhaps it would spring into life again, with its shiver of delirious delight.

She noted McGregor's massive shoulders, the graceful swell of his iron muscles. Surely he was a beautiful animal to look at,—so was a moose,—but the moose forgot his strength and went floundering through the snow to his death when the blood-song of the wolf-pack began to shiver among the spruces.

Surely the wolves were the true lords of the wilderness, and Jean Jolet was like the wolves, gaunt and sinewy, and not afraid. She was certain of that, he was not afraid.

Jean Jolet would never shame her with his cowardice. He would even face the wolf-pack with a smile; fight and die like the brave Yellow-knife hunters.

"Jean, you want to go back to Swamp Creek?" the passionless voice of the big trapper questioned.

"Sure thing, if you've changed your mind. Wouldn't like anything better," Jolet boasted as he unfastened the dogs.

"No, I haven't changed my mind, but Singing Wind has. She's got a hankering for old McPhearson's fur, and it's you and her for it. I'm going South; been in the stunted forests too long already. You can give me a lift with the dogs tomorrow, as far as Swamp Creek if we get the snow that's threatening."

Singing Wind looked at Jolet. She could see the fire of happiness dancing in his eyes. They two, alone, would battle for the rich trapping-grounds of McPhearson—sure it was bravery that would be an honor to even a Yellow-knife. But over the pulsing of her new happiness, the dull pain of regret gripped her heart. Once she had gloried in the blind faith that this iron-limbed man who had come from the South was braver and stronger than other men. Now he had cast her aside rather than fight.

If he had been a murderer she could have forgiven him. If he had been a grub-thief in a famine-stricken camp, and had stolen for her, then she would have crawled on her knees to kiss his hand, but a coward,—that was beyond the law, the iron law of the Yellow-knife people, that a woman must be a bearer of burdens and the men must be unafraid.

Jolet did not question whether Singing Wind was willing to share a trap-camp with him or not. It was the pride he had inherited from his French father that forbade him making inquiries. Of course a Yellow-knife squaw would be glad to share a camp with Jean Jolet, the trapper.

Singing Wind understood his view of the matter, yet it hurt her, for she was a daughter of the Yellow-knife people who ruled over the northern snows.

She saw McGregor spread his blankets beside the fire, and she waited hopefully. Perhaps the wolf-man of the northern snows would come to her, to ask her consent. She saw him finish his pipe and spread his blankets for the night—and no word was spoken.

The woman of the Yellow-knife sat alone beside the fire. The spruce branches burned to a heap of coals, that threw a bloody light upon the surrounding forest.

She heard the plaintive wailing of the rising wind among the spruce-tops. A gust of wind came swooping down out of the northeast and scattered the white ashes of the fire about the camp; an owl hooted out in the blackness of the swamp; the sledge-dogs stirred uneasily in their sleep; then one of them lifted his nose to the dull murk of the northern skies and sounded a troubled wail.

Singing Wind was a daughter of the Yellow-knife. Each of these things carried a message to her;—she knew it would be snowing before morning. So she crawled away to her own blankets, while the camp-fire died out and the blackness of the northern night crept closer and closer to the sleepers. In the morning one of them would turn his back upon the northern snows, to breast the long miles that led back to the land from whence he had come.

When Singing Wind awoke next morning she found a white and lonely world. The storm had spent its fury out among the swamp. She prepared the breakfast, while the men got the outfit ready for the trail.

Three miles to the northwest was the little cabin where big Duncan and she had spent those few months of happiness,—a camp beside the game-trails of the Yellow-knife people. Ten miles to the south lay the trail-camp at the mouth of Swamp Creek. They would spend the next night there.

The big Scotchman would soon turn his face toward the South—and Jolet and she would proceed to the abandoned camp in the country of McPhearson.

The fresh dogs swung off through the swamp with a chorus of glad yelps that kept time to the lurch of the sled.

Singing Wind huddled among her furs and watched the ghostly spruces slip by. At regular intervals the two men changed places, the one who had been riding at the front would take his place at the handle-bars and run behind the sled. Not a word was spoken except a sharp command to a dog that was shirking.

At midday a halt was made. A pot of tea was prepared, and a portion of smoked moose-meat eaten, then the rested dogs were urged across the white miles of wilderness.

The days were short at that season of year, and soon the shadows of night began to creep in among the snow-covered spruces and night voices called, faint and far away.

The gloom of the spruce swamps deepened. The whine of the sled-runners upon the snow was now the only way to guage the speed of the weary pack.

Soon they would reach their last camp, and the soft-spoken giant would go out of Singing Wind's life; would probably go in silence, this strange man who was almost perfect, but who was afraid to fight.

Out in the night shadows of the spruce-swamp she heard the rallying call of the wolf—her blood-brother of the northern wilderness. His fangs were bared against the whole world, but her heart went out to him, that lonely gray brother of the swamps, for was she not a daughter of the Yellow-knife whose hands were against all mankind?

The wolf-call sounded closer, and the weary dogs quickened their pace; that in-born wilderness fear urging them across the night miles to a bend in the trail where the road-camp offered its shelter.

Soon the wolf-call changed to a full-throated cry in the shadows behind. Then the heart of Singing Wind grew cold within her breast,—cold with the fear of the wild. It was not a moose that was fleeing for its life, but a trail-spent dog-team and a loaded sled. Louder and louder rose the gloating death-song of the pack. Jolet, at the handle-bars, added his ringing voice to the medley, as he urged the dogs to greater speed.

Then the voice of the man behind awoke a memory that had grown strangely remote during the quiet hours of the ride. It was Jean Jolet behind there,—the wolf-man who was never afraid.

He would fight the wolf-pack; would show the trembling coward upon the sled how a man of the northern snows could fight. The thought filled her with a happiness that almost drowned her fears.

A moment later the sled gave a lurch and their speed slackened. The wolf-man was riding the sled. For a moment the woman thought he was getting his rifle ready for the battle. She reached out her hand and touched him as he crawled past her on the sled. She wanted to let him know that she was proud of him, that her heart would be with him in the red agony of the battle. Then the heart of Singing Wind grew heavy and dead within her breast. The body of Jean Jolet, the wolf-man of the northern snows, was a-shiver with fear.

The dogs swung out into an opening where the light of the northern day still lingered. She turned and glanced backward. A gray, shifting blotch upon the snow disclosed the fact that the pack was almost upon them,—and Jean Jolet, the wolf-man, had added his weight to the burden of the sled, and was cursing the dogs with a strange, shivering voice, while the pack crept closer and closer across the snow.

Once more the sled lurched as one of the men leaped to the ground. The hunched-up figure was almost hidden by the flying snow as they reeled past. Singing Wind reached forward to urge her husband to fight; not to leave the man back there to fight their battle alone.

With a cry she sprang back and shook the furs from her and groped for a rifle, for her hand had closed upon the lean, trembling arm of the wolf-man huddled among the furs.

A rifle shot rang out in the night; the dog team swerved as if to go back and join in the fight.

Singing Wind thrust a rifle into the hand of the man. He pushed it aside, grasped the whip, and beat the dogs back onto the trail.

Again the rifle spoke behind them and the hot tears rushed down the cheeks of the woman. She was a daughter of the Yellow-knives who never turned their backs upon a foe.

Back there in the road was the man she had hated because he was afraid—the man who was going out of her life in the morning.

Singing Wind thrust a hunting-axe in her belt, grasped a rifle and leaped from the sled.

The rifle back there on the trail was speaking as fast as Duncan McGregor could swing the lever;—no one in all the North could use a rifle like that.

The firing ceased before the woman reached him, and she knew that the big Scotchman was at death-grips with the pack. She leaped blindly forward;—the honor of the Yellow-knife was at stake.

Then she saw them in the night gloom, a giant whose clothes were torn to ribbons by the fangs of the pack, whirling like the hub of a great, gray wheel, and swinging a hunting-axe in a deadly circle that cut into the wolf-pack better than any rifle. The pack opened before the shrieking thing that raced down upon them—a thing that belched fire and death as it came.

Then with empty guns beneath their feet, they fought back to back—the woman of the Yellow-knife and the man she had scorned. She could feel the man reel in his wild and deadly thrusts at the maddened horde. The snow grew slippery with blood, and the heap of still gray forms grew higher around them. The pack wavered, then returned for one last drive.

Singing Wind felt the man at her back sink to his knees; yet he fought silent-lipped and determined as the gray beasts swarmed out of the night gloom.

Then over the snap of slavering jaws there came another sound,—the blessed, honest battle-song of the sledge-dogs returning to the fight.

As the yelping challenge of the dogs drew nearer across the snows, the beaten pack slipped away into the shadows, and the battle-wrecked giant who had dared to stand in the path of the gray brotherhood that ruled the northern snows, slipped down among his dead enemies in the crimson, trampled snow.

Singing Wind raised her eyes to the blue, dancing stars. No sound escaped from her close-drawn, bloodly lips—for she was a daughter of the Yellow-knives who hid their hearts beneath their fur robes and battled for the mastery of their lean land.

When the lead dog floundered up to lick

the face of his senseless master, Singing Wind threw her arms around his neck and buried her face in his thick fur and listened to the night-voices that called from the shadows.

Tenderly she lifted the man from the bloody snow and rolled him into the sled. Then the road-song of the wolf-dog went ringing far through the northern night.

The man stirred among the furs. He lifted a blood-stained face to the blue starlight, saw the woman and questioned weakly:

"Where is Jean? Did the wolves get him?"

"They won't catch him as long as his legs hold out," Singing Wind whispered spitefully.

"How far is it to the trail-camp; we must be most there," the man puzzled, half delirious.

"We're going home," whispered Singing Wind softly, as she hid her face on the man's shoulder,—"back to the lean land of the Yellow-knife, that never bred a coward."

A sheaf of unusual stories
in the January BLACK CAT:

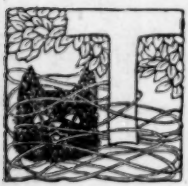
A story of New York's Chinatown—not a tong war story.
An automobile story.
A story of a little girl who hadn't any blessings.
A story of Southern hospitality, flavored of course with mint juleps, but utterly unlike any other story you have ever read in which there was a Southern colonel.
An advertising story—with a surprise ending.
A sea story.
And three others.

Nine unusual stories. Fresh in theme and handling.

TUBBY AND THE TRIANGLE

BY V. V. FARM

Somewhere in the old geometry book you may find a better theorem for this triangle story than the one we have selected. But after reading the story you will agree that "preparedness should begin at home." Write Q. E. D. and let it go at that.



THE college-bred tramp fingered his cigarette finically while he nibbled through a dirty, dog-eared magazine, a phœnix from some ash can. His companion by the camp-fire, deftly skinning a chicken for the feast, was also a college man, but his *alma mater* had been the University of Rude Bumps, and he bore many of her insignia upon his person.

"I see, Jimmy," said the browser, "that this editor doesn't want any more of those triangle stories."

"What yuh mean," said the busy Jimmy, absently, and without a note of interrogation in his voice. He cracked the fowl's legs and broke them off before he looked up.

"Why, this two-men-and-a-woman plot, don't you know!" replied the literary one.

"Oh, sure!" exclaimed Jimmy, as light broke; "two ginks and a skirt. Or me and you and this chicken. Now, don't forget I saw it first."

"Say," he added, as he spitted the neatly trussed fowl over the fire to roast, "speaking of chickens, I can tell you about one triangle that some guinea of an editor would fall for if you'd dress it up in a bunch of that stylish language you are in the habit of spilling about."

"Proceed," chanted the unshaven Bachelor of Arts.

"Well, a year ago last summer," began Jimmy, briskly, "I got a job on a chicken farm in New Jersey, and after two weeks' experience I answered an 'ad' and applied for a position as poultry expert to Tubby.

"Theodore Dayfield was his real name, but by a process of dissociation of ideas and fatuous affection it had been transmogrified into 'Tuddy' by the wife of his bosom. 'Tuddy,' as a cognomen for a grown man, I did not like, so I further corrupted it in my own mind to 'Tubby,' to sort of counterbalance his amazing slimness, which was the most utterly utter I ever see.

"Yes, slim he was and little, and bulbous-headed, and blinky-eyed, with plate-glass spectacles and a calm air. You would have known he was a scientist before he told you. That's what he was, and he had come to the country for quietness and privacy in which to pursue his Big Idea and track it to its lair.

"Chickens was just a recreation with him, and as he knew even less than I did about them, I managed to put across that expert stuff, backing it up as I did by a testimonial I had written myself on the letter-paper of the New Jersey farm. So I was appointed curate to the hens, with services thirteen times a day.

"Let me tell you from the first that Tubby's wife seemed a dangerous apurtenance for an ex-University professor to possess. A nectarine? A whole fruit basket! And, say, she could go over them piano keys like a runaway steam engine—except when she played that tender Chopin stuff with the love-light in her eyes. I seen her at it once, and Tubby looked like a mesmerized, tomfool Billy-goat, watching her. Oh, they were as happy as doves until their little world turned turtle—as sometimes happens to dove cotes.

"Well, of course Tubby didn't spend all his time watching his wee wifie sting the keys to repartee. He had a laboratory fixed up over the kitchen of the old farmhouse, and he sentenced himself to solitary confinement therein for three hours every morning. The afternoons he spent roaming

through the bush with his dogs, or helping me around the chicken-house. He had about a thousand white leghorns, and it was some job manicuring them every day.

"Evenings I usually slid down to the village after I had put the hens to bed, because Mary Ellen, the girl in the post office, looked kind of good to me.

"I never did rightly understand what Tubby was driving at in that there laboratory. Some of the ossified 'ologies, I suppose. I didn't fish for information. I left the fishing to Tubby. He had been senior angler, or something like that, at dear old Hoxford. I suppose he baited with bookworms. Anyway, he once told me that his discovery, when completed, would alter the methods of the whole fiscal world. Or maybe it was physical world—I don't know.

"But every morning the mysterious rites began in the same way. Shortly after Tubby had locked himself in, there would be a series of explosions, much like gunshots; then a bunch of noises something like the sound you make when you succeed in hitting the nigger on the head with the baseball at Coney. Then things would quiesce, and, I suppose, the fisherman had settled down to his fiscal philosophizing.

"About the time I was ready to feed the hens their warm mash mixed with sour milk, (not sloppy, just crumbly), Tubby would open his door, and the dogs would be waiting for him.

"That was the only thing I didn't like about the place,—them dogs,—two of the meanest, cantankerest, unfriendly curs that ever refused to wag a tail. White bull terriers they were and they hung to Tubby's heels for the rest of the day. I accepted and embraced his advice concerning them: 'Leave them alone and they'll leave you alone.'

"Sometimes Tubby would fail to appear, then Mrs. Tubby would claim protection under the by-law of habeas corpus, and elect to break down the door.

"Tubby would refuse to waive extradition proceedings, and would enter a plea for further committal, as he believed himself hot on the trail of the Big Idea.

"Mrs. Tubby would file a demurrer, as dinner was getting cold.

"Tubby would thereupon make declaration and affadavit that it would never occur again, and subpœna his meals in the laboratory.

"If Mrs. Tubby delivered a favorable verdict, we sometimes saw nothing of her little man for two or three days. Then he would reappear, baffled and grim, but thinner and calmer than ever. The Great Solution had once more failed to solute.

"After a time, there began to occur a shortage in the treasury. It seemed that the Clandestine Experiments were draining the exchequer. The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker began to moan for money. My influence with Mary Ellen, down to the general store and post office, helped some, but although I made violent love with all the art of me nature, there came a time when credit was withdrawn even from that quarter for the Tubbys.

"Mrs. Tubby wept and wanted her little man to go back to University work and the regular pay-envelope, but Tubby was reinforced concrete in his determination to see the thing to a finish.

"The hens was no more than paying for their feed. Tubby had had me trap-nesting them for a laying strain, and it was going to take some considerable time to weed out the shirkers that wouldn't make shells in our little munition factory; so I thought of a scheme.

"'Mr. Tub—Dayfield,' I says, one day, 'you got a nice-looking bunch of birds. What's the matter,' I says, 'with showing some of them at the State Fair next week?' I says.

"'James,' says he, and I thought I descried the scientific equivalent of a twinkle behind the plate-glass, 'for a poultry expert you talk almost like a human being. We shall do as you say.'

"So I washed the pick of the birds in peroxide, and scraped their legs with a toothpick, and chased them to the show. And would you believe it? We beat out all the old-timers, the real experts, and the Lord High Muck-a-mucks, and walked away with the blue ribbon.

"Maybe we didn't get no orders for eggs then. Setting eggs at a dollar a piece! There was corn in Egypt once more, and

me and Mary Ellen got engaged. But Mrs. Tubby couldn't get rid of the hankering for civilized life, as she called it, where her dear 'Tuddy' wouldn't need to go into voluntary confinement for days together.

"Next, enter the Hypotenuse of the Triangle—a big, strong, black-eyed, swarthy, long-haired, high-toned fiddler, named Lancelot Murfree. He had come to the country for quietude and privacy. He said he wanted to prepare his programme for the next concert season.

"He was too emotional to use a hairbrush, and swooned with joy when he found Mrs. Tubby could lambast the ivories with so much precision. Soon they were rehearsing every afternoon, and they seemed to put a lot of work on the Cruiser Sonata by one of the old masters—Tolstoi, I think his name was.

"Of course the dogs didn't like him, but I didn't let that prejudice me in his favor, for every time he'd turn those uncanny black lamps on me I'd almost get the willies.

"He seemed about seven feet tall, and was very proud of his tremendous strength; always bending pokers or crushing things in his hands to show what 'technique' had done for him.

"One day Tubby comes along and whispers me a secret. I suppose he just had to tell somebody or bust. It was this: he had surmounted his Biggest Obstacle, and now it was only a matter of days until he would be able to announce his Great Discovery. He didn't want to tell Pippa—that's what he called his missis—until he had everything done up brown.

"I was mighty glad to hear the news, for the way that lachrymose, long-shanked lobster of a Lancelot was hanging around the little lady was enough to create in one a case of chronic violence to violinists. And Tubby never went near them, for he was living in the laboratory night and day now, rounding up his quarry.

"Another reason why I was dee-lighted to hear that fame and fortune was almost in the grasp of the little man was because of the setting eggs. The season was almost over for them, and orders were beginning to drop off,—which pointed to another financial crisis in the near future.

"One afternoon I was busy taking some eggs out of the racks where we kept them in the feed-room when along comes Tubby. His face was flushed and I wondered if he had taken to drink.

"'James,' says he, 'what are you doing?'

"'Getting these eggs ready, sir,' says I, 'to take over to the summer-kitchen. I've got to pack a crate for the evening train.'

"'All right,' he says, in his short way. 'I'll help you.' And he picks up a pail.

"'James,' he asks, as we walks over, 'where is Mrs. Dayfield this afternoon?'

"'I think, sir,' says I, 'she went down to the village to post some letters.'

"'Unfortunate!' says he, quietly. 'I wanted to tell her the news. I've finished my work, James. I suppose I'll be a millionaire before many moons.'

"Then I knew why his face was flushed. Except for this sign, he showed no more excitement than a school-boy who has finished working a sum in arithmetic. Yet I knew he was busting to tell her.

"The dogs were so glad to see Tubby again that they almost knocked the pail of eggs out of his hand, so he shut them both in the woodshed. As we entered the summer-kitchen we saw Mrs. Tubby and Lancelot Murfree standing together by the table.

"I don't know what gave me the notion, but there seemed to be something in the atmosphere that made it the wrong time and place for Tubby to spring his Joyful News. Mrs. Tubby turned her eyes on him in a queer way without smiling, and Murfree's looks reminded me of a snake—a loathsome rattlesnake ready to strike.

"I think Tubby sensed something wrong, for instead of speaking he merely blinked inquiringly.

"It just began to dawn on me that I'd better make my exit, when Mrs. Tubby froze me to the floor by her abrupt words.

"'I am going away with Lancelot,' she said, in a dull voice that suggested a hypnotic state.

"Tubby went white, and blinked harder than ever.

"'Yes, Dayfield,' said Murfree, with a

poisonous look, and a spit in his voice that made me think of some vicious rodent; 'she is going away with me—my soul-mate. I have gone through life taking where I willed. I intend to pluck this most beautiful flower, and no one shall hinder me.'

"He looked so big and dangerous and threatening that I began to shake all over, although my muscles felt limp and sort of paralyzed. I tried to reach behind me for one of Mr. Potts's irons, but I couldn't make my arm budge.

"Tubby blinked and kept mum. The power of speech seemed to have left him.

"'I cannot live like this any longer,—a dull, lonely, barren life. I am going far away to a world of beauty and music.' Mrs. Tubby said this in the tone of a schoolgirl repeating her lesson.

"'Yes, yes, she is going,' said the big, black brigand, with a nasty snarl in his voice, 'and if you so much as lift a finger to interfere with what I have willed—I'll —crush you. So, be warned!'

"My brain seemed to be whizzing with the useless speed of a squirrel-cage. I could think of no way to help, yet I remember feeling a sort of contempt and pity for the little man who could only stand there tongue-tied while a long-legged crook coolly took his wife from him.

"Then Tubby found his voice;—just his ordinary, conversational voice.

"'You snake!' he said, pleasantly, and moved his right hand.

"Murfree jumped as if to strike, but stopped short at sight of a pudgy-looking, shiny revolver in the little man's fin.

"'Murphy, or whatever your name is,' went on Tubby in the same kind tones, 'you are more than a foot taller than I, and probably three times as strong; hence, this little 'evener.' He wiggled the gun slightly. Murfree started nervously.

"'Don't alarm yourself,' said Tubby, in his sweetest voice; 'I'm not going to shoot if I don't have to.' Then he put his fingers to his mouth and whistled. I didn't think he knew how.

"There was a crash of glass; the dogs were coming through the woodshed window. They bounded into the summer-kitchen and cavorted around their master. "'Watch him!' he said to them, pointing to the big fiddler. The dogs wheeled like soldiers, bared their teeth, and growled. Murfree stared at them with a look of baffled wickedness.

"'Ever since I was a boy,' remarked Tubby, in a tone of kindly reminiscence, 'I have been handicapped. Nature was chary of her physical gifts; and I have had to combat the disadvantages of myopia and the lack of athletic ability. For the manly art of self-defense I have had to make substitutions. This is one,' he added.

"'For years I have practised daily, and at short range I shoot with absolute accuracy. I mention this to remove any doubt from your mind. I am very, very fond of my little friend.' He wiggled the gun again.

"'Now, Murphy,' continued Tubby, with the loving voice of a Sunday-school superintendent, 'in this little affair of ours I have on my side both right and might.'

"'And bite,' I chimed in, looking at the dogs.

"'James,' he said, without turning his head, 'I will request your silence.'

"'Yes sir,' I answered, respectfully, my feelings not the least bit hurt. In fact, I felt like whooping.

"'Murphy,' continued our little man, cheerily, 'I propose to solve this problem in triangulation strictly unaccording to the laws of trigonometry. Indeed, I shall carefully eschew anything that smacks of the conventional. I shall neither shoot you in a fit of jealous rage, nor turn my face away in sorrowful renunciation, and murmur: "Take her; she is yours, since she loves you."

"'I might mention that, as a further means of self-defense, I have assiduously studied the science of ballistics, which, as you may know, deals with the impact, path, and velocity of projectiles. In the practice of its simpler forms I have fortunately acquired considerable skill. Thus you will realize that, in regard to the question of defensive measures, my sentiments, vote, influence, and example, have always been on the side of preparedness.'

"Tubby transferred the gun to his left hand.

"'In the use of this weapon I am ambidextrous. These dogs have killed a mountain lion. I advise you not to be, for the next few minutes, too peevish and petulant. James, hand me the eggs.'

"'They are worth a dollar a piece,' I said, with a roguish smile, but respectful-like.

"'Silence, James,' he said mildly.

"I'd never seen anybody look so pleasant as our manikin did then, nor anybody so viperish and wicked as the big black fiddler, standing at bay. I remember he had on a lavender tie and a gray suit about the color of a rat's belly.

"Tubby put the pail down beside him, and, in the same movement, palmed an egg with the slickness of a conjurer.

"'I shall be forced to disarrange your cravat,' he said, apologetically.

"The egg flew out, and the big gink's necktie became a beautiful golden yellow, with shell trimmings.

"Murfree spat out a word that he hadn't learned in Bible class, and made an involuntary movement forward; but a savage duet of growls held him.

"Tubby reached for another egg and landed it square on the bottom button of Mr. Giant's vest. Goliath cursed David in low, hissing tones, like a real stage villain.

"The little shepherd boy hit the next button up, and the crescendo of curses swelled to a higher pitch. 'We are going up the gamut,' he said presently with a jocose air.

"He picked off every button and the curses began to turn to moans. The rat-gray suit was fast becoming a weird creation. Then he put nine dollars' worth of perfectly good eggs down each immaculately creased trouser leg. He wasted two strictly new laids in the vicinity of the solar plexus, and produced a crushed-sunflower effect on each lapel of Murfree's coat.

"Soothingly, he remarked: 'It must be comforting to realize that our shells are, without exception, of the non-explosive variety.'

"By this time the big booby was shedding real tears, and crying for mercy.

"'Perhaps you are aware that a fresh egg is an excellent tonic for the hair,' said Tubby, as he picked up another, 'but,' he added, with a judicial air, 'after all, I don't think you need any.' And he put the egg down. Then he turned to his missis.

"'Well, Pippa,' he said, slowly, 'there he is. I've played my hand, now it's your move.'

"She seemed to come out of her trance and actually laughed.

"'I pass,' she said, raising her pretty eyebrows.

"'Good,' cried the little man; 'Pippa passes. All's right with the world.'

"Then he turned to the weeping willowy Willie-boy.

"'And so, my elongated friend,' he said smilingly, 'your name may be Lancelot, but hers doesn't seem to be Gwenny Vere.'

"Then he added, in a paternal tone: 'You have my permission, now, to put on your raincoat, take your suitcase and fiddle-box, and catch the next train. But, remember,' he concluded, with exaggerated sorrow, 'if we ever meet again, it must be as strangers.'"

A spindrift of cigarette smoke wreathed the listener's features.

"How did you part from Mary Ellen, Jimmy?" came the query.

"Well," answered Jimmy, with a grin, "as the great Woodyard Kindling says: 'that's another lie.' Kindly pass me the cutglass salt-cellar and the pepper-basement; this chicken's done to a turn."

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